Teaching Reading Comprehension for the Development of Literacy Skills in Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in Mainstream Schools: Pedagogy, Practices and Perceptions

Kathleen Sarah Smyth

A thesis submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Lincoln for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Professional) in Education

April 2021

Abstract

The Department of Education and Science (DES) in Ireland advocates additional help for pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) to be provided where possible in the mainstream classroom setting (DES, Circular SP ED 02/05). In order to facilitate all learners within this inclusive context, I felt that it was necessary as a teacher to embrace inclusive strategies in my teaching. As I have a special interest in the teaching of literacy to children with reading difficulties, this study explored Teaching Reading Comprehension for the Development of Literacy Skills in Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in Mainstream Schools from the perspectives of pedagogy, practices and perceptions. The aim of my research is to build a holistic picture of the system of teaching reading comprehension at both home and school as it currently exists in order to interpret its strengths and challenges according to principals, mainstream class teachers, learning support teachers, children with SEN and parents of children with SEN, and ultimately to enable schools to adapt their pedagogical practice to support inclusion of such children.

The research began with a survey of relevant literature describing some of the models of reading and examined current theoretical underpinnings in relation to practice in the teaching of reading comprehension strategies. An interpretative, qualitative research design was employed with data collection from interviews and documentary evidence obtained from schools to provide evidence. My research was conducted across five mainstream primary schools in Ireland. Twenty participants were involved in the study. This cohort included a principal teacher, a mainstream class teacher, a learning support teacher and a parent from each of the five participating schools. Data was also collected from pupils through access to School Self Evaluation (SSE) documentation and teacher's reports. The criteria for inclusion of parents was that they should have a child in the particular school who presented with a reading disability. This study revealed that pupils presenting with SEN could have their literacy skills enhanced in the mainstream classroom by using inclusive strategies to develop their reading comprehension ability. The study also proposes best practice in the pedagogical application of the theoretical models underpinning the process of reading based on my research findings.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Ian Abrahams and all in the University of Lincoln and Mayo Education Centre who helped me throughout my studies. Sincere thanks to former directors of Mayo Education Centre, Art O'Suilleabháin and Paul Butler respectively and to all my colleagues on the doctoral programme. I extend a sincere thank you to all of the school staff and parents who participated in this research - your honesty made this study possible.

I wish to extend my most sincere and heartfelt thanks to Dr. Carol Callinan who helped me throughout the greater part of my doctoral journey, and shone such luminous light and gave me such great help, hope, advice, encouragement and excellent guidance.

I also wish to extend a very special and earnest thank you to all who supervised this work at various stages, namely Dr. Karin Crawford, Dr. Fiona King, Professor Sarah Amsler and head of Doctoral programme Dr. Joss Winn. Sincere thanks are also extended to Beverley Potterton and Professor Howard Stevenson.

I thank all of my wonderful family: my brother Pauric, my sister-in-law Lorraine and my nephew Patrick, my sister Ann and my brother-in-law Pauric for the support which they gave to me and especially to my loving husband John, for all his kindness, help, love, care and encouragement.

I think of all of the people with special educational needs with whom I have worked over the years and I am very thankful to them for all that they have taught me.

I dedicate this work to the memory of my beloved mother and father in thanksgiving to them for their lifetime of love. When I was a child, my father worked as an Irish migratory labourer in the potato fields of Lincolnshire. I am sure that my father often wiped his brow and looked towards the cathedral on the hill overlooking the Lincolnshire countryside. Little did he think that one of his children might one day graduate as a Doctor of Education in that same cathedral? I feel that I have now completed my father's journey. The money that he earned from working in those fields helped me to realise my dream in the cathedral on the hill. I hope he will know that his labour was very worthwhile. I also dedicate this to my beloved nephew Patrick, whose great love inspires and blesses every day of my life.

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Glossary of Terms

AfL: Assessment for Learning.

AoL: Assessment of Learning.

Autism A lifelong neuro-developmental disability that affects the development of the brain in areas of social interaction and communication.

BERA: British Education Research Association: http://www.bera.ac.uk.

Co-morbid: The presence of one or more additional disorders co-occurring with a primary disorder.

CPD: Continuing Professional Development.

DEIS: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools. Schools may be classified as disadvantaged by the Social Inclusion Section of the DES using DEIS Banding categorisation.

DES: Department of Education and Skills: http://www.education.ie.

Dyslexia: A general term for disorders that involve difficulty in learning to read or interpret words, letters and other symbols, but that do not affect general intelligence. It is sometimes called a Specific Learning Difficulty (SLD).

Dyspraxia: A form of developmental coordination disorder (DCD). It is a common disorder affecting fine and/or gross motor coordination in children and adults. It may also affect speech.

EBD: Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties.

Gifted and Talented are those who display evidence of high performance capability in areas such as creative, intellectual, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields.

INTO: Irish National Teachers' Organisation – primary teachers' union: http://www.into.ie.

IQ: Intelligence Quotient.

ITE: Initial Teacher Education.

L & N: Literacy and Numeracy.

Learning Support Teacher: provides supplementary teaching for pupils with high-incidence disabilities.

Literacy Lift Off: A class-based short term programme aimed at increasing children's competency in oral language, reading and writing. It originates from the strategies taught in Reading Recovery.

Mainstream class: A class in a regular primary or secondary school.

MICRA – T: Mary Immaculate College Reading Attainment Test – a standardised primary reading test.

Multi-sensory Approach: involves the use of many senses for learning such as visual (sight), kinaesthetic (touch), and auditory (hearing).

NCCA: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment: http://www.ncca.ie.

NCSE: The National Council for Special Education: http://www.ncse.ie.

PDST: Professional Development Service for Teachers: http://www.pdst.ie.

Phonics: The knowledge that that a particular letter of the alphabet (grapheme) or pattern of letters represents a sound.

QSR: Research software developer of NVivo.

Reading Comprehension Strategies and Skills: Understanding, analysis, deduction, summarisation, inference, prediction, confirmation, synthesis and evaluation.

Reading Recovery: An intensive daily, one-to one, short-term early intervention programme focussing on reading, writing and oral language and the intrinsic link between the three.

Resource Teacher: provides supplementary teaching for pupils with low-incidence special educational needs.

ROI: Republic of Ireland.

SAT: Standardized Attainment Tests.

SEN: Special Educational Needs – 'the educational needs of students who have a disability and the educational needs of exceptionally able students' (Education Act 1998, 2 (e)).

SENCO: Special Educational Needs Coordinator (UK context).

SENO: Special Educational Needs Organiser (Irish context).

SERC: Report of the Special Education Review Committee, Government of Ireland, 1993.

SET: Special Education Teacher.

Shared Reading: An interactive reading experience that occurs when a child joins in or shares the reading of a book or other text while guided and supported by a teacher or a parent.

SLI: Specific Language Impairment.

SNA: Special Needs Assistant.

Sound Linkage: A phonological awareness training programme.

Sounds Abound: A programme that provides a sequential series of classroom activities to develop phonological awareness.

SQ3R: A reading comprehension strategy named for its five steps: survey, question, read, recite, and review.

SSE: School Self Evaluation.

Station Teaching: A class is divided into a number of small groups or "stations" and with the help of support teachers the children receive intensive teaching at each station.

Supplementary teaching is extra teaching a pupil receives from another teacher, eg., learning support or resource teacher.

Support teacher: a teacher who provides additional support to pupils with SEN and learning difficulties. This may be a learning support or resource teacher.

UK: United Kingdom.

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

US: United States.

Visual Timetables enable children to understand what they are doing and when over a period of time for example the school day. Symbols or pictures are used to represent the lessons, activities, or tasks and these are taught to the pupil. They are then displayed as a timetable to give a visual picture of what is happening.

Vocabulary Development is the extension and enrichment of childrens' word knowledge and understanding.

Withdrawal teaching involves withdrawing or 'taking out' pupils from their mainstream class in order to work with them on a one-to-one basis or in a small group.

Writing Frame: A resource that teachers use in order to show children how to plan their writing and prompt them to include certain elements.

WSE: Whole School Evaluation.

Chapter 1: Introduction

> 'It should be possible to enable all human beings – including the disabled – to develop their full potential, to contribute to society and, above all, to be enriched by their difference and not devalued. In our world constituted of differences of all kinds, it is not the disabled but society at large that needs special education in order to become a genuine society for all.' —Federico Mayor-Former Director General of UNESCO.

1.1 Introduction: What I am researching and why?

This research explores how the teaching of reading comprehension is supported in the development of literacy skills in the mainstream school setting in the Irish context where children presenting with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are included. The definition of special educational needs for the purpose of this study is that contained within the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004): '[Special educational needs are] ... a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition' (Section 1, [1]).

It is my hope that my research will enable teachers to adapt their pedagogical practice to support inclusion of such children (Lynch, 2007; Ní Bhroin, 2017), as educational research provides an insight into what motivates action in policy development and teaching (Edwards, 2002). Competence in methods of evidence-based enquiry supports good teaching standards in that policy and teaching improves. I hope that this will be a benefit of conducting this research. The possible impact of bridging the gap between research and practice according to McIntyre (2005) results in the development of knowledge-creating schools. This link between professional practice and research underpins the role of research in this study and enhances the professional development of principal teachers, mainstream class teachers and learning support teachers.

While ‘special educational needs’ may refer to the educational needs of both students who have a disability and those who are ‘exceptionally able’ (Education Act, 1998), this study focuses on how principal teachers, class and learning support teachers and parents of primary school children presenting with reading difficulties support their development in reading comprehension. In this research, ‘comprehension’ is the construction of meaning from printed material. Comprehension is an interactive process that requires the use of background knowledge, which the reader brings, in conjunction with the material that is found on the printed page (Department of Education and Science, 2008). Readers connect what they already know with information in text. The aim of the research is to build a picture of the system of teaching reading comprehension (at both home and school) as it currently exists in order to interpret its strengths and challenges according to principal teachers, mainstream class teachers, learning support teachers and parents of children with SEN – and, ultimately, enable principals, teachers and parents to adapt their pedagogical practice to support inclusion of such children.

The curriculum in Ireland advocates the fostering and development of higher comprehension skills in order to equip the learner reader with skills to extract meaning from the text. The Primary Curriculum (1999) further suggests that ‘children will need a consistent and structured experience of questioning, discussing and probing the text in order to arrive at its full meaning’ (p.61). This approach entails much more than mere recognition of words if the ultimate objective of reading comprehension is to be attained. In the Irish context, the new Primary Language Curriculum (2015) ‘supports teachers to help children to progress in their language learning and development through the primary years’ (p.7). In my research I aim to build a picture of the system of provision for the development of reading skills as it currently exists and interpret its strengths and challenges. It is my aim to aspire to fulfilling of the ideals of the new Primary

Language Curriculum by presenting an inclusive and comprehensive reading programme arising from my study for children presenting with SEN.

In addition, within the Irish context, Literacy and Numeracy for learning and life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020 (Department of Education and Skills, 2011:17) set targets for improving literacy and numeracy standards to be achieved by the year 2020. Some of the key areas aimed at improving literacy outcomes are building the capacity of school leadership to lead improvements in the teaching of literacy, getting the content of the curriculum for literacy right at primary levels and enabling parents to support children's literacy development.

However, despite the introduction of these national strategies, pupils who present with Special Educational Needs (SEN) within the mainstream school setting present with great problems in the acquisition of reading comprehension skills (Ott, 1997). I therefore aim to understand how these goals are being met for children with SEN – how principals lead and organise the teaching of reading comprehension through school policy and planning, how teachers translate this into strategies and methods for teaching reading comprehension to children who present with reading difficulties in their classroom settings, and how parents support their children's reading comprehension at home.

The overarching aim of the research, to build a picture of the system of teaching reading comprehension (at both home and school) as it currently exists in order to interpret its strengths and challenges according to principal teachers, mainstream class teachers, learning support teachers and parents of children with SEN – and, ultimately, enable principals, teachers and

parents to adapt their pedagogical practice to support inclusion of such children was achieved through an exploration of the following questions:

- What is the current practice in the teaching of reading comprehension in literacy skills for children with SEN included in mainstream schools?
- What strategies support the development of reading comprehension skills within the context of home based literacy?
- What pedagogical intervention strategies are classified as best practice by schools?
- Which strategies work best for children with SEN in the classroom?
- How do teachers currently assess reading comprehension?
- How does this assessment of reading comprehension inform their teaching?

These questions will be explored through data collected from participants about perspectives on curricular provision, pedagogies in the classroom, provision of programmes, assessment and how this links with enabling parents in the home to help their children in the area of reading comprehension acquisition. Two major approaches – the skills-based approach and the meaning-emphasis approach – as well as the simple view are discussed as models of reading (Garcia and Pearson, 1991), along with the triangle model of reading (Adams, 1990) and the dual route model (Coltheart, 1978), as I also investigated if teachers apply these models of reading theories in their classrooms and, if so, examined how this translates to classroom practice. In the study, I also used these models of reading as an analytical framework to interpret participants' experiences, perceptions and voices.

In order to comprehend the nature of reading theories underpinning this study, they are explained in this thesis as the theoretical models of reading. The theories can be defined as a set of ideas that provide an explanation of the phenomenon of reading development. A model is a purposeful representation of that reality. This can be considered as an example of theory influencing how the processes examined are enacted in practical environment in order to explain the phenomenon of reading. The models are a representation of reading that provides us with a structure on which

to establish a reading programme. The theories are a set of ideas that provide us with an explanation of how reading development occurs. By proposing a model, it makes it easier for the reader to gain a better understanding of the concept of reading comprehension, as it provides us with an understanding of the phenomenon of reading development that is explained in the theory supporting it. An approach is a way of looking at teaching and learning that gives rise to methods (the way of teaching something) which use classroom activities or techniques to help learners to learn. The theories therefore lay the foundation for the models proposed which interact with the approaches. Different theories of reading are espoused within the models and these theories dictate the approaches and the methodologies that are used in the classroom. The model is underpinned by the theories and the approaches are the actual classroom methodologies, classroom practices and strategies. A model is based on a theory and this leads to an approach being developed. The theories therefore lay the foundation for the models proposed. Therefore, in this thesis, the terms 'theories' will be used to highlight the explanations about reading development, the terms 'models' will be used to refer to representations that provide structures to guide the process of teaching reading and 'approaches' will refer to the methods that are applied.

Talking to principals, teachers and parents was thus necessary in order to explore the reality of current provision in the area of reading comprehension from the perspectives of curricular provision, teachers' pedagogies in the classroom, provision of programmes, assessment and how this all linked with enabling parents in the home. I also ascertained if teachers currently place emphasis on assessment and testing or on the teaching of the strategies necessary for the development of reading comprehension skills within the inclusive classroom setting.

1.2 Background to the Study

As I reflect upon my own professional role and upon the placing of my research interest in the context of my current practice, I consider the thoughts of the father of reflection, John Dewey, who defined reflection in action as 'that which involves active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or practice in light of the reasons that support it and the further consequences to which it leads' (Dewey, 1910, cited in Zeichner and Liston, 1996:9). In this light my experiential learning in my early career provided me with the necessary body of practical and academic knowledge to equip me as a nurse in the discipline of intellectual disabilities (SEN). Prior to this training, I had worked in a full-time voluntary capacity for two years in a home for persons with severe and profound intellectual disabilities.

Boud and Walker (1991) contend that reflection is the processing of the experience and the re-evaluation of perceptions which then become the basis of new or transformed knowledge and this will have implications for decisions on further action. While training to become a teacher, my perceptions in the care of persons with intellectual disability (SEN) were re-evaluated as I now looked upon this development from an educational model as well as from a model of care. During my teacher training programme, my nephew Patrick was born presenting with a rare congenital genetic disorder called Prader-Willi Syndrome. This event was to re-shape all things that I had learned in the past and would influence all that I would learn in the future, as I then fully realised the personal and professional impact of the implications of living with a child with special educational needs.

My initial teaching experience taught me that much of my teacher preparation remained in the traditional epistemology of practice that did not recognise the teacher's ability to diagnose a learning difficulty and did not appear to take into consideration the realisation that teacher

knowledge must play a dynamic and active role in all the challenges that the school and the classroom presents for children with SEN. I subsequently completed a post-graduate diploma course in special educational needs (SEN) resource teaching and a Masters' Degree in Special and Inclusive Education. In my current role, I teach within the multi-class context in a mainstream two-teacher rural school in Ireland. There are thirty seven pupils in the school. Included within my cohort of pupils are children presenting with learning difficulties. A learning support teacher who is shared between three schools in our locality works with us for ten hours per week in a part-time capacity. It was because of this that I felt it necessary to up-skill myself in order to meet the needs of the children within my classes presenting with SEN. As well as having responsibility for the teaching of the four junior classes, I also hold the position of school principal.

Central to my professional development was the learning that took place regarding the importance of developing in children a love of learning at an early age and a desire to enable them to develop successful lifelong learning strategies. In order to enable children to acquire knowledge, I have learned that building a good foundation in the area of early literacy is necessary (DES, 2005). It is for these reasons that my interest in the development of reading comprehension as my initial research idea was born.

1.3 Special Education: An Inclusive Agenda

The integration of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools has been a major topic in special education discourse for the last number of years. However, currently, the term `inclusion', which represents a variety of assumptions about the purpose and meaning of schools has come to supercede 'integration' in special education vocabulary (Kliewer, 1998).

A study investigating the attitudes of mainstream teachers towards the inclusion of children with special needs in the mainstream school (Avramidis et al., 2000) conducted in one Local Education Authority in the south-west of England comprising of eighty one primary and secondary teachers, revealed that teachers who have been implementing inclusive programmes in their schools, and consequently have active experience of inclusion, exhibit more positive attitudes towards inclusion. The data also highlighted the importance of professional development in the formation of positive attitudes towards inclusion, revealing that teachers who had completed substantial training in special education had a significantly higher positive attitude than those with little or no training about inclusion and hence were more confident in addressing the individual needs of children with SEN in their classrooms.

Some conclusions emerging from the research synthesis conducted by Avramidis and Norwich (2002) reveal that teachers, although portraying a positive attitude towards the general philosophy of inclusive education, however, all did not agree with a 'total inclusion' approach to the provision of special education. Instead, many maintained conflicting attitudes about school placements of pupils with SEN, based largely upon the nature of the students' needs. Teachers were more eager to include students with mild learning disabilities or physical/sensory impairments than students who presented with more complex SEN. Teachers held negative attitudes to the implementation of inclusion of children with more severe learning needs and behavioural challenges. Given the consistency of the presence of these negative attitudes, government departments wishing to promote inclusive education may have a difficult task convincing their educators about the feasibility such a policy. Consequently, it is necessary that the process is carefully planned and well supported, so that teachers' initial reservations or

concerns are addressed and this requires a flexible allocation of the available resources based on the variety of needs represented in the Irish inclusive classroom.

Inclusion in the Irish context is defined as ‘a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of learners through enabling participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and removing barriers to education through the accommodation and provision of appropriate structures and arrangements’ (NCSE, 2011:13). However, in order to address the steps that must be taken in order to achieve this concept, firstly, the historical context must be outlined in order to illustrate how present services have developed in Ireland. There is no doubt that significant progress has been made in the area of the provision of inclusive education in Ireland and the role of legislation has enabled this change to occur.

Traditionally, the medical model of disability which focused on the causes and symptoms of the disability and on its treatment perceived the ‘problem’ as seen to lie with the person with the disability (Callinan, 2017). In contrast the social model of disability places a focus on the environment within which the person with a disability lives (Flood, 2013). The assumption underpinning the social model is that the environment or school should be adapted to meet the needs of the person with a disability and not the other way around. However, in order to examine current inclusive practice, its development must be placed within a historical context and therefore the role which legislation has played must be addressed.

1.4 Enabling Change Historically: The Role of Legislation

Legislation within the arena of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and inclusion has undergone a paradigm shift. Traditionally in Ireland, children presenting with SEN tended to be separated

from the mainstream of society (Carey, 2005). However, in more recent times Ireland has developed comprehensive legislation in order to ensure that children with disabilities receive an appropriate education within a more inclusive setting. This was preceded by international legislation. The 1975 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (USA) ensured that all children with a disability would have a right to a free public education appropriate to their needs. Within the UK context the recommendations of the ground-breaking Warnock Report in 1978 were incorporated into subsequent legislation governing special education provision. The concept of 'special educational need' emerged from this report in an attempt to move away from the aforementioned traditional medical model of disability which was used in special education up to this time. The report was critical of the dominant policy of categorisation which determined educational provision at the time. It suggested a wider perspective which challenged the thinking underpinning the provision of special education based on the medical model. The Warnock Report 1978 stated:

> The purpose of education for all children is the same; the goals are the same. But the help that individual children need in progressing towards them will be different. Whereas for some the road they have to travel towards the goals is smooth and easy, for others it is fraught with obstacles (para.14, p.5).

Tensions within this statement imply that as teachers we should never accept a situation of inclusion without education. In other words, we must continually seek out the best models of practice that will meet children's needs. As education is heavily influenced by national policy in Ireland, in this light it is imperative to discuss the importance of policy formulation and its translation into practice (Travers et al., 2010). This is a key issue if inclusive education is to become a reality as envisaged by the ideals contained in the UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994) on the education of all disabled children. The Salamanca Statement called for inclusion to

be the norm and adopted a new framework for action with its guiding principle proposing that 'ordinary' schools should accommodate all children. Thus, the framework advised that disabled children should attend their local school. It also proposed that one of the most effective means of combating attitudes of discrimination and creating a welcoming community was through the inclusive orientation of a regular or mainstream school.

The Department of Education was established in 1924 and at the time, the education of children with SEN alongside their so-called "non-disabled" peers was not considered appropriate. In 1947, St. Vincent's Home for Mentally Defective Children was established by the sisters of the Daughters of Charity and was recognised by the State as an official school. In 1959 the first inspector for special education was appointed by the Department of Education. In 1965 the development of specialist schools was supported by the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Mental Handicap. The report also suggested that in some cases, mainstream schools should include special classes for children who were deemed as "slow learners". The expansion of special schools was largely completed by 1970 while establishment and expansion of special classes occurred during 1970s and 1980s.

In 1993 a major publication entitled The Report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) dealt comprehensively with the educational implications of SEN. The enactment of The Education Act (1998) was followed in succession by the Education (Welfare) Act (2000), Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) (2004) and the Disabilities Act (2005). This legislation had implications for ensuring equitable access to and delivery of special educational provision. The Education Act (1998) was a piece of legislation that outlined the legal rights and responsibilities of the Irish Government in relation to education and had

relevance to special education. The main purpose of the Education (Welfare) Act (2000) was to ensure that every child in the Irish state attended a recognised school or otherwise received an appropriate education. The act also required schools to ensure that all children regardless of special educational need or disability, participate in and derive benefit from the entire life of the school. The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) (2004) was the most significant piece of legislation in Ireland relating to the education of children with special educational needs and created several new bodies with duties and responsibilities for special education. However, most sections of this act were deferred and therefore, have not been mandated. The Disabilities Act (2005) was designed to protect the rights of the disabled. This act provides for the appropriate assessment of both the health and educational needs of persons with special needs and assures that appropriate planning will be undertaken on their behalf consistent with the resources that are available.

However, in light of current trends and developments, the many educators involved in leading and managing special and inclusive education are aware that many possibilities and challenges are posed for schools in enhancing inclusive provision in the whole school context as resources may be limited or indeed not available at all (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002). Much more needs to be achieved before we can really turn placement into inclusion and many pertinent issues need to be addressed (Rix et al., 2013). The concept of inclusion 'promotes the active participation of the learner as the primary aim rather than simple placement or accommodation. It also emphasises the need for changes within the education system and the school to accommodate the learner' (NCSE, 2011:14).

In this thesis, I address the concept of what inclusive education embraces, the role of legislation and the necessity for adequate finance. I also examined the need for the development of policy and curriculum to enhance provision and practice. Within this context I considered these issues and the application of theory and research within my own context of practice as a principal teacher in a mainstream primary school. From my research, I also endeavoured to formulate my argument for leading and managing organisations towards sustainable school development so that the learning of individuals, groups and classes will be effectively managed within an inclusive context.

1.5 What is Inclusive Education?

Inclusive Education can be broadly defined as a process whereby the diverse and specific needs of all learners are addressed by reducing barriers to, and within the learning environment (UNESCO, 2005). Within the Irish context, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2007) advocates:

> inclusive education involves schools developing their culture, management, organisation, content and approaches to teaching and learning, to accommodate the educational needs of all students to the greatest possible extent (p.4).

What is important about this definition of inclusive education is that it places the onus on the school to adapt a variety of teaching strategies outlining: clear learning objectives, formative and summative assessment strategies, appropriate lesson content matched to the needs of pupils, use of multi-sensory approaches and appropriate teaching materials so that the needs of the child with SEN will be accommodated.

Thomas et al. (1998) proposed that the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE) (a UK charity that works to promote equality and eliminate discrimination in education) implies that the inclusive school is community based and reflects the community as a whole without being selective, exclusive or rejecting. It is accessible to all its members both in terms of the physical structure of the building, the curriculum it provides and the support systems it puts in place. A sense of collaboration is promoted as well as a fostering of a sense of equality where all participants have rights and responsibilities. However, Wilson (2000) implies that there are some important caveats which need to be addressed in relation to these claims. He asserts that 'any school is 'selective' if only by its locale or catchment area;' and that 'it cannot reflect the community as a whole' (p.298). He continues that instead of being a democracy, 'all schools are governed by a hierarchy of authorities not appointed by the pupils' (p.298). Furthermore, he contends that parts of the school are not accessible to everybody and that parts of the curriculum are not accessible to those who do not have the ability to access them.

Thomas et al. (1998) proposes that the concept of an inclusive philosophy has:

> been able to succeed because it chimes with the philosophy of a liberal political system and a pluralistic culture – one that celebrates diversity and promotes fraternity and equality of opportunity (p.5).

Thomas also claims that 'inclusion must be at the heart of any society which cherishes these values and at the heart of a truly comprehensive education system' (p.5). However inspirational this may seem, there is an increased strain placed on teachers teaching in special classes where they do not have adequate qualifications and also on teachers working in mainstream classes where there is a lack of support from school principals and colleagues alike (McCoy and Banks, 2016).

The inclusion agenda must be moved forward and we must not allow inclusive provision to date to be the end of the matter if we are to truly embrace inclusive education. In light of this, I wish to contribute to and offer a basis for the development of inclusive practices in relation to the teaching of literacy. The challenge of developing, fostering and sustaining inclusive pedagogical practices was the current area of focus for my study to support inclusion for all learners. In my experience, if we are only supporting children in the withdrawal context then the expectation is that we expect the children to transfer that learning (from the withdrawal context) back into the mainstream class setting. As children with SEN present with difficulties in the transfer of skills, this transfer presents a major challenge for them. It is clear that inclusion specifically in the area of literacy is debatable, however, the policy in Ireland would be inclusion for all subjects and that would include the teaching of reading. This is why inclusion is desirable from a teaching of reading context within the mainstream school. A discussion around the key issues in relation to inclusive policy and practice is necessary.

1.6 Key Issues in relation to Inclusive Policy and Practice

Legislation both at a national and international level increasingly underpins inclusive policies and practices within the special education arena. Central to the debate on inclusive education policy and practice is the concept of the ‘organisational paradigm’ of inclusion. Ainscow (1997) proposes that SEN arises out of the way in which schools are currently organised and does not arise out of deficits within the students themselves. This proposal contrasts with a medical model in which disabilities and difficulties are attributed to inherent 'deficits' in individuals to be identified and treated as 'abnormal' in segregated settings. Skidmore (1999:23) debates ‘whether support for learning is about changing the pupil to suit the curriculum, or adapting the curriculum

to the needs of the pupil.' I found that, on the basis of my own personal experience, adaptation of the curriculum is necessary.

In order to appropriately address this notion, those who plan, manage, coordinate and implement inclusive education policy within schools must evaluate their current practice. In this light the practices and processes which are exclusionary must be addressed in favour of practices which foster inclusion. Critical perspectives on policy strategy and initiatives provide a context within which current policy may be discussed and future policy formulated.

Lloyd (2008) in critically analysing recent policy within the UK relating to the inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream schools reports that:

> far from ensuring full participation as a right, the policy for inclusion can be seen to have done little to increase genuine access to the mainstream for these pupils and may well have even increased exclusionary practices therein (p.221).

In 2004 the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) reported that 'taking steps to enable pupils with SEN to participate fully in the life of the school and achieve their potential remains a significant challenge for some schools.' However, in relation to this statement it may be implied that as a direct result of schools endeavouring to operate within the positivist paradigm of achieving specified learning objectives and targets with its main focus on outcomes, a barrier has thus been created which denies children with SEN full participation and equal educational opportunity.

Relating this to the Irish context and supporting this notion, Griffin and Shevlin (2007) contend:

> schools face many challenges, such as increased public accountability, compliance with legislative demands, parental expectations, improving standards in literacy and numeracy, ensuring that young people achieve examination success, responding to socio-economic disadvantage and appreciating all aspects of diversity (p.256).

Contradictions and tensions therefore often exist between the parameters of what I would consider appropriate inclusive educational provision and appropriate curricular content in response to the need of all pupils within the inclusive classroom (Griffin and Shevlin, 2007). Griffin and Shevlin (2007) suggest:

> developing inclusive education programmes in our schools involves moving beyond the traditional barriers that prevented the full participation of many children who have been marginalised and at risk of school failure for a variety of reasons, including special educational needs, socio-economic disadvantage or socio-cultural differences (p.83).

In considering the needs of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), Simmons and Bayliss (2007) highlights that the learning environment of the special school is not always best for such children. They conclude that with greater opportunity for peer interactions and an inclusive ethos, mainstream schools 'may be able to support gains in children with PMLD that special schools are unable to' (p.23).

However, transferring the aspirations inherent in these statements to everyday life in our schools proves to be fraught with many possibilities and challenges. The effective planning, managing, coordinating and implementation of inclusive educational policy is therefore critical to ensuring that an educational experience is nurtured within which all children can flourish. It is therefore necessary that schools are empowered to make the informed decisions and changes that they feel are needed in order to facilitate and support inclusive education.

1.7 Rationale for the Study

In considering the rationale for the study, it is firstly necessary to consider policy initiatives relating to the redistribution of additional resources for a more equitable provision of supports for inclusion of children with special educational needs. The Special Education Teaching

allocation outlined by the DES (2017), sought to provide a single unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on that school's educational profile. This single allocation was made to allow schools to provide additional teaching support for all pupils who required such support in their schools. Schools were requested to deploy resources based on each pupil's individual learning needs. In the allocation of additional teaching supports to schools the NCSE (2014), proposed that the school educational profile component and the baseline component be provided to every mainstream school to support inclusion, prevention of learning difficulties and early intervention. The baseline component was outlined to support schools in having whole-school policies and practices in place to prevent and diminish the emergence of low achievement and learning difficulties. It was also established to enable schools to implement early intervention programmes for all students. This baseline allocation was designed to support the work of the school and class teacher in including students with special educational needs and to provide some scope for the management and organisation of special education within a school context.

Addressing revisions of initial teacher education, the Teaching Council (2011) proposed that there was a need for modules to focus on developing teacher expertise to include children with special educational and diverse needs across the curriculum. The Teaching Council proposed that programmes should equip newly qualified teachers with a set of competences to facilitate quality learning and cater for literacy, numeracy and inclusion as well as preparing student teachers for teaching, learning and assessment underpinned by subject knowledge and pedagogy, school and classroom planning, classroom management and differentiated teaching. Research on the impact of this on newly qualified teachers conducted by Hick et al. (2018), revealed that

student teachers reported that a gap exists between feeling adequately prepared for inclusive teaching in relation to developing the right attitudes and values, and inadequately prepared in relation to having the confidence to use their newly acquired skills and knowledge to implement inclusive practices in the classroom context. Although student teachers placed great value on their placement learning, however, they indicated that they would have liked more opportunities to access practical advice, gain support with problem solving and engage in critical reflection with teaching colleagues while in schools. The research points to the 'importance of enabling collaborative working, with support for critical reflection on planned opportunities for inclusive practice. Likewise, the assessment of inclusive teaching practices is likely to form a key influence on how deeply a commitment to inclusive teaching is embedded across ITE programmes' (p.127).

It is imperative also to acknowledge the literacy focus of professional learning provided by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) to schools within the Irish context, in enabling the process of School Self-Evaluation (SSE) (DES, 2012; 2016), encouraging school collaborative planning and evaluation across curriculum areas including English language and literacy. SSE is a reflective process of internal school review that embraces collaborative engagement through reflective enquiry on teaching and learning in the school, with a view to enhancing improvement and development. The SSE process enables schools to take the initiative in improving the quality of education that they provide to their students and places a greater emphasis on collecting, examining and sharing evidence about the work of the school when making decisions about what is effective practice and what areas of the school's work needs to be improved and developed.

It is also necessary to consider literacy assessment results from secondary analysis of Growing Up in Ireland data (Cosgrove et al., 2014) which was a large-scale longitudinal study of children in the Irish context. Two age cohorts were included, with data from two survey administrations completed; an Infant cohort aged nine months and three years and a Child cohort aged nine years and thirteen years. Overall, results indicated that children with SEN scored two-thirds of a standard deviation lower on both reading and mathematics than children without SEN and the study concluded that many children with SEN are not benefitting to the extent that they could be.

Results from the Growing up in Ireland data indicated that reading scores of children with special educational needs at age nine are quite strongly related to their achievement in reading at age thirteen, therefore early identification and remediation of reading difficulties by implementing appropriate interventions is necessary. Despite making progress since they were nine years of age, thirteen year old students with special educational needs were still faring worse than their peers without special educational needs in a number of areas including the acquisition of literacy (Cosgrove et al., 2018).

However, as indicated by PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) regarding subscales as an assessment of informational reading, there were no reading purpose, either Literary or Informational subscales. For the comprehension process subscales of Retrieve/Infer and Interpret/Evaluate, Irish pupils achieved largely similar scores on each and there were no notable differences between girls and boys (Eivers, Gilleece and Delaney, 2017).

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000), an initiative of the federal government of the United States of America (USA), has also reported the importance of teaching reading comprehension strategies when considering best practice in the area of reading instruction. Brooks (2002) considers that reading comprehension is the most under researched area of reading improvement. Although I will be addressing a research gap, I will also aim to look at approaches that can be applied by classroom teachers in order to support children with reading difficulties.

1.8 The Irish Context

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) was established in 2005 to expand the delivery of education services to persons with SEN with a particular emphasis on children. The NCSE also has a statutory role to conduct research in SEN to underpin its work by providing an evidence base in conjunction with its roles related to planning, assessment and service delivery including the allocation of additional teaching and other resources available to support the special educational needs of children. Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) in the NCSE process applications for additional teaching and Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for children with SEN.

The Special Education Review Committee Report (SERC) favoured ‘as much integration as is appropriate and feasible, and as little segregation as necessary’ (DES, 1993:22). The SERC report also encouraged a continuum of provision for a continuum of needs, while acknowledging that special schools were a necessity for some children with SEN. The Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) developed this trend towards inclusion by seeking to enforce the constitutional right of all children to an education. This act places an obligation on schools to

identify and provide for the educational needs of all students, including those with SEN. Following this, the Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) (DES, 2004) added to this legislation. It concentrated on the development of individual education planning, educating children in inclusive classrooms, and the provision of a variety of appropriate services, including assessments and other educational supports. The EPSEN Act presents legislative framework and a coherent policy that underpins education of children with SEN.

The establishment of the National Educational Psychology Service (NEPS) 1998 sought to assess the needs of students and assist in the development of individual education plans. Within the Irish context unique challenges present themselves in relation to the inclusion of students with SEN because the education system is focused on the preparation of pupils for state exams. In 2007 the DES published its Post Primary Guidelines for Inclusion (DES, 2007), which advocated that a whole-school approach to inclusion be adopted that would provide practical guidance on roles, responsibilities and collaboration for inclusion including outlining strategies for best practice at classroom level as well as for individual students. This whole-school approach to inclusive education was a considerable departure from the previous model, which saw children with SEN educated in a segregated environment from their peers. It represented an optimistic step towards meeting the individual needs of every child with SEN (Winter and O'Raw, 2010).

The teaching of reading has always been a source of considerable interest, not least because of the purported complexities of the reading process (Iversen and Reeder, 1998) and because literacy is necessary for survival in daily life (Ott, 1997). However, while a plethora of

theoretical models endeavour to provide insight into the reading process, as teachers we still find ourselves as practitioners in a position where we are failing children (Government of Ireland, 1993).

In Ireland, approximately 20% of children in first and second classes are receiving learning support in literacy, as they are considered to be under-achieving. Data obtained in 2013 indicated that 11% of children attending disadvantaged schools in Ireland were reading at or below the 10th percentile in second class (and an additional 8% were not tested, due to absence or exemption from testing) and this figure rose to 20% by sixth class (Weir and Denner, 2013).

As far back as 1993 within the Irish context, while an estimated 0.3% of pupils were formally identified as having an unacceptable reading level, one report stated that 2% was a more likely estimate for incidence, as many children presenting with reading problems were not identified (Government of Ireland, 1993). A more recent survey of reading among fifth class pupils in Ireland reported no significant change in reading standards in the intervening time (Eivers et al., 2004). According to Lerner (2006) at least 80% of the general population of students with learning disabilities encounter problems with the mechanics of reading whether they are in inclusive education settings or not. Despite the public endorsement of inclusion (Thomas et al., 1998) such figures bring into sharp relief the gap between policy and practice; between notions of including all children and raising literacy standards to a level that provides access for all to the reading curriculum.

1.9 Addressing the Irish Context

The rationale for my research is to explore the teaching of reading comprehension from the perspective of the teacher and to endeavour to investigate what strategies a mainstream class

teacher could implement to try and support children with reading comprehension difficulties in their classes. I want to develop a model of practice that a teacher would be able to apply in their classrooms. I wish to support the literacy curriculum within the Irish context for mainstream class teachers, like myself, who have children with SEN and reading difficulties included in their classes and to endeavour to have a programme designed to meet their needs within the mainstream classroom context as there is no such programme available at present. I wish to develop a programme based on my findings (that teachers identified as best practice) underpinned by the theoretical models of reading and bring all of these elements together under the umbrella of one comprehensive programme. At present, there is no such model that draws on the elements determined in the theoretical models of reading as being the most beneficial for children with SEN undergoing tuition in a mainstream classroom and presented as one cohesive programme. This justifies the significance and novelty of the study and also justifies the study as it outlines 'what is missing' by identifying and addressing the gaps in the literature addressed and emphasising why it is important to address those gaps. I also wish to present the psycho-linguistic literature and make this more accessible for the class teacher as well as giving an overview of how the theoretical models of reading underpin the reading process. This will ensure that teachers understand the process by which early reading is acquired and how reading skills are subsequently developed and consolidated.

A study of the theoretical models of reading highlight that there is no one best method for teaching literacy, therefore I wish to highlight a range of strategies with which all teachers should be familiar. Emerging from discussions with colleagues, it is important to view literacy

across the multi-class contexts and give due cognisance to the crucial early years of literacy development.

As a practicing teacher of children at the early and emergent stages of reading, I have found that, good readers are strategic, motivated and set goals for reading, while being selectively attentive, able to make inferences, and integrate information across texts. They are able to activate and connect with prior knowledge, attend to text structure, visualise, ask questions of the text, determine importance, critically evaluate as they read, retell information, summarise and synthesise as they read. They have the ability to process text before, during and after reading. In contrast, I have found that children who present with reading difficulties are unable to do this without the help of comprehension strategies that should be developed from the earliest levels of the primary school.

In my practice, I have found that effective practices which promote inclusion for all children have suggested that the principles of good teaching are essentially the same for all children, including those with special educational needs. However, while I have made 'normal' adaptations to teaching methods in class teaching for the majority of children, I found that a greater degree of adaptation was required for those with more significant learning needs. Hence, some learners with SEN required high levels of practice, more examples of a concept, and greater implementation of teaching of strategies to master key literacy skills within the context of intensive multi-sensory learning opportunities. This work can be supported by the application of my model that promotes engagement in higher-order literacy skills such as oral language discourse, vocabulary, comprehension and compositional writing (fiction and non-fiction) which are taught along with basic skills such as phonological awareness, decoding, spelling and reading fluency.

We need to equip teachers to develop students' literacy skills and we need to equip teachers to provide effective teaching and learning experiences. There is a need to incorporate a teacher led research-based balanced literacy programme where appropriate attention is given to both higher- and lower-order skills and strategies within meaningful contexts and according to the stage of development and needs of the children. There is also a need to specify the components of language that are associated with children's development of phonological processes (phonemic awareness, syllabification and decoding), and those that are important for comprehension, acknowledging that the latter need to be developed from the early stages of reading development.

As a teacher, I need competence in teaching the basic building blocks of reading: awareness of words and word components (phonological and phonemic awareness), phonics (letter-sound rules), word identification, vocabulary, comprehension (the ability to derive meaning from text) and fluency, letter-symbol recognition, the explicit development of higher-order skills and strategies for reading comprehension (e.g. retrieving, synthesising, inferring, questioning, critically evaluating). Coupled with this, enabling the development of handwriting, spelling, punctuation and enabling children to choose topics, generate and craft ideas, revise and edit, all support writing development. These skills encourage young people to read for enjoyment, and to write and communicate in a range of authentic contexts for different purposes with a variety of audiences developing children's enjoyment and capacity in literacy. Given that a key emphasis in early childhood education is the recognition of the holistic nature of early learning and development in literacy skills there is a need for such a holistic programme to be developed.

1.10 Conclusion

This introductory chapter presented my rationale, aims and research questions that this study is based upon. It outlined the context of the study set in five primary schools in the ROI, along with the philosophical underpinnings and my position as the researcher within the process. The research originates from calls for more emphasis to be placed on supporting children with SEN in our classrooms and to accommodate the diversity of their needs in relation to literacy acquisition. The notion of inclusion as part of a wider debate on appropriate educational provision is addressed. Therefore, this research focused on pedagogy, practices and perspectives.

Chapter two presents a critical analysis of the literature surrounding the theoretical models of reading from which the research questions evolved. It addresses the aim of reading comprehension and outlines what is the purpose of reading. The challenges which may be experienced by a child with SEN in learning to read are also outlined and profiles of children with reading comprehension difficulties are presented as well as factors which should be considered in the formulation of an inclusive and comprehensive programme in the teaching of reading including the role of vocabulary teaching, Chapter three describes the methodology employed in this study, and the data analysis procedures used. Chapter four reports the findings to each of the research questions and discusses these in relation to the literature. These findings are then synthesised and explored. Finally, Chapter five provides an introductory restatement of research problem, aims and research question. It assesses the value, relevance and implications of the key findings of my study in light of existing studies and literature. A summary of findings and limitations of the study that may affect the validity or the generalisability of results is

included. Practical applications and implications for theory, practice and further research are outlined and claims are made for new knowledge and contribution to knowledge in the area of teaching reading to children with SEN in mainstream schools. I outlined how my new model of teaching reading to children with SEN will make a contribution to practicing classroom teachers. I also included what a programme for in-service training in SEN for practicing mainstream classroom teachers should entail, as well as formulating a programme that would help parents in the home context. Finally I addressed the area of positionality and provided a reflexive account.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

2.1 Introduction

In this section I will discuss the topics and themes that are relevant to this study and I will provide a rationale explaining how they are linked and why they are important to this literature review. Initially, I will outline the search terms and sources of papers selected. I will address the aim of reading comprehension and outline what is the purpose of reading. Profiles of children with reading difficulties are discussed, along with the challenges that may be experienced by a child with SEN in learning to read as well as factors which should be considered in the formulation of an inclusive and comprehensive programme in the teaching of reading.

As part of the research process, I sourced the peer-reviewed journal articles selected by conducting a search in Google Scholar and in databases pertaining to education, teaching of literacy, reading comprehension and SEN in the University of Lincoln library catalogue such as Academic Search Elite, Psychology Information and ERIC. ERIC was selected because of the amount of educational related references that was contained therein. Search terms that I used included reading comprehension difficulties + SEN + teaching approaches, reading disabilities + reading comprehension in elementary schools, SEN + reading difficulties, SEN + learning disabilities, SEN + reading disabilities + mainstream literacy teaching. In order to find journals and e-journals with reference to the Irish context, I accessed the archives of the National Disability Authority as well as sources cited in a document titled An Inventory of Research and Policy Related Publications in the Field of Special Education on the Island of Ireland since 2000. I also researched text and reference books and SEN publications on the subject of reading comprehension and literacy teaching in general. Because I was not looking for specific special needs models and approaches to reading, the criteria on which research

was included and excluded from the review was based on researching mainstream approaches to teaching, because I anticipated that these would be the models and approaches that the mainstream classroom teacher would use in their particular contexts.

This review of literature examines theories underpinning the reading process, particularly from the perspective of developing inclusive reading comprehension skills. At the outset this literature review will explore some of the more prevalent theories that underpin understandings of the reading process and examine some models of reading instruction. The 'skills-based approach' and the 'meaning-emphasis approach' as well as the 'simple view' are discussed as models of reading (Garcia and Pearson, 1991) along with the triangle model of reading (Adams, 1990) and the dual route model (Coltheart, 1978), as an understanding of these models will help to inform the research and applying them in practice is suggested to help to close the gap between policy and practice as identified in the introduction. The role of vocabulary teaching is also addressed. Current research is examined in light of the role of teacher preparation and comprehension strategies instruction. The parental role in reading is also considered as an important factor in order to determine the value it brings in the development of reading comprehension. Embracing the school and home contexts provides a holistic approach to the teaching of literacy and has therefore been combined in this review.

This literature review will be placed within the context of inclusion as the notion of inclusion is core to the context of my study. The purpose and focus of the research study is to explore the management of the teaching of reading comprehension strategy instruction in the development of literacy skills within the mainstream school setting where children presenting with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are supported. In compiling this review, I have examined texts relating to the subject matter sourced from

peer reviewed academic articles, handbooks of reading research and reading comprehension as well as texts relating to reading instruction and pedagogy.

2.2 What is Reading? The Aim of Reading Comprehension

The ultimate aim of reading is comprehension. Janet Lerner asserts that 'the purpose of reading is **comprehension**; that is, gathering meaning from the printed page.' (2006: 387, emphasis in original). It is therefore relevant to define what the concept of reading comprehension means. Lerner (2006:388) defines reading comprehension as 'an active process that requires an intentional and thoughtful interaction between the reader and the text.' In this context the reader will endeavour to bridge the gap that exists between what they are reading and the knowledge which they already possess in order to make sense of it. Lerner concedes that the comprehension of reading depends on what the reader brings to the written material by way of experience, knowledge of language and recognition of syntactic structure (Lerner, 2006). Thus reading comprehension is a thinking process which is akin to problem solving and requires active interaction with the text.

The current debate surrounding the teaching of reading suggests that learning to read is a complex process and requires the interaction of a number of skills such as visual discrimination, visual and auditory memory, language, phonological skills and knowledge of rhyme (Westwood, 2003). At present there are many varied competing models of reading instruction. Because each model has its own theory on how reading and instruction are to be defined, they in turn indicate different practices in the classroom and therefore many critical questions need to be asked.

There is no one single approach to the teaching of reading (Flynn and Stainthorp, 2006). This further compounds the problems that children with SEN may experience. As these children are often taught within an inclusive setting, the challenges which they present

with, in the development of reading comprehension acquisition are addressed within this review by highlighting the elements that are critical in the provision of a balanced reading programme. In this light factors necessary for the formulation of an inclusive and comprehensive programme in the teaching of reading are discussed.

Studies by Bishop and Adams (1990), for example, conclude that proficiency in phonological processing is not the main determinant of reading acquisition. Bishop and Adams suggest that while the measurement of reading in terms of phonological awareness is quantifiable, comprehension however, and the range of skills which support it, is much more difficult to measure. This highlights that while one may subscribe to the importance of comprehension as well as decoding, the lack of clarity is further aggravated by the tension between the meaning-emphasis based proponents versus the subscribers to the knowledge and skills based approach, i.e. the top down versus bottom up approaches to the teaching of reading. The 'simple view' of reading (Hoover and Gough, 1990) is presented as a model in which reading and comprehension is a function of the interaction between the ability to decode words and language comprehension. In discussing the models of reading, one must be aware that many divergent approaches may be necessary in order to facilitate the differing needs of pupils and no one single approach may provide all the answers.

Although there are many reading comprehension interventions available, research in the area of effective reading comprehension strategy teaching is relatively new. Svensson (2008) concludes that 'drawing together of a wealth of research evidence helps us to work productively to meet the personalised needs of all pupils, whether we call them late developers, dyslexics or precocious readers' (p.174). In selecting evidence based intervention programmes, Brooks (2002) summarises extensive research in this area and evaluates many approaches to the teaching of reading comprehension. According to

Brooks (2002:12) many aspects of reading improvement are under-researched in the UK, but the most under researched of all is the area of reading comprehension. Brooks concludes that 'there have been few quantitative studies of how to help children who can read accurately, in the sense of decoding fluently, but who appear not to understand much of what they read' (ibid. p.12). This research report reviewed early intervention schemes that had been devised to help struggling readers and writers, and was intended to inform schools' choices among such schemes. The evidence concluded that ordinary teaching proves that there is a need for early intervention schemes as ordinary teaching alone does not enable children with literacy difficulties to catch up with their peers. From conducting research he deduced that 'there appeared to be no tendency for schemes other than Inference Training to bring about greater improvements in children's comprehension than in their reading accuracy, or for the opposite to occur (p.13). He proposes that 'from the limited evidence available it can tentatively be deduced that children's comprehension skills are benefited most by being directly targeted, and not indirectly through work on reading accuracy' (ibid. p.13).

Swanson and Hoskyn (1998) conducted an analysis of research on reading interventions and summarised a comprehensive synthesis of experimental intervention studies that included students with learning disabilities. They advocate that teaching students strategies, such as predicting what might happen next, as an aid to reading comprehension is relatively more effective than other methods. This is supportive of the pervasive influence of cognitive strategy and direct instruction models for remediating the academic difficulties for children with learning difficulties. It is of great importance that children should be given the opportunity to review and recall their prior knowledge of the subject matter of the text so that they will be able to survey and predict what knowledge they might gain from it. Viewing comprehension more as a connective

activity and less as construction enables the reader to reconcile information and interpret it in a way which is more holistic. In light of this, appropriate strategy teaching in this area must be given consideration in order to support inclusion; this issue was addressed within my research.

2.3 Challenges experienced by a Child with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in Learning to Read

In addressing the challenges experienced by a child with SEN in learning to read, Ott (1997) proposes that the child tends to struggle with the actual process of deciphering print and actually misses out on the interpretation of meaning. It is for this reason that one should listen to the advice of Meek et al. (1977) who encouraged teachers to ask the question: what is reading for?

In the early stages of learning to read, the best curricula offer an amalgam of elements, including reading for meaning, reading for thinking, experience with high quality literature, systematic instruction in phonics, systematic instruction in reading comprehension skills, development of sight vocabulary and ample opportunities to read (Lerner, 2006). The development of such a reading programme for children with SEN considers the difficulty they may experience with the transfer of learning from one context to another and with the generalisation of skills and as a result needs an integrated and inclusive pedagogical approach.

According to Carey (2005), a programme based on the knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the individual pupil, which adopts an inclusive and multi-sensory approach, addresses the challenges experienced by a child presenting with SEN. In my research I therefore specifically addressed how comprehension strategy instruction can be used as an effective intervention for children with literacy difficulties in the primary

school. A range of comprehension strategies need to be included in the teaching of reading (PDST, 2014). Comprehension strategies can be defined as 'the 'mental processes' that good readers use to understand text' (PDST, 2014:12) and this will enable the learner to acquire the ultimate objective or reading which is the reconstruction of meaning (English Teacher Guidelines, 1999). Effective comprehension instruction involves the instruction in the following elements: word identification, fluency development, vocabulary development, comprehension monitoring and application of comprehension strategies (Courtney and Gleeson, 2010).

In the Irish context, in light of this research, there is a move towards the use of evidence based practices to meet the needs of all children with only those who do not respond to this being in receipt of additional support. There is a need for evidence based practices to be applied in the context of the mainstream class and an approach worth noting is Response to Intervention (RtI) (O'Connor and Sanchez, 2011). RtI aims to identify struggling students early on and give them the support they need to be successful in school and in accessing the curriculum. RtI is not a specific program or type of teaching but rather a proactive approach to measuring students' skills and using this information to decide which types of targeted teaching to use appropriate to the needs of the child. RtI is therefore an approach to the early identification and support of students with learning needs. The RtI process begins with instruction and screening of all children in the mainstream classroom. Following this process, readers who are identified as struggling are provided with interventions in order to accelerate their rate of learning. The interventions are designed to target the student's skills deficits (Cogan, 2017). Interestingly, what is showing up in the literature on this Response to Intervention (RtI approach) is that 'very little is known about how RtI might be managed for students whose reading disability is due to language delays and poor comprehension' (O'Connor

and Sanchez, 2011: 124) and this was addressed in my research. However, in order to determine the appropriate intervention and approach to teaching, the profiles of children who are in need of help need to be outlined.

2.4 Profiles of children with reading comprehension difficulties

In order to understand how best to teach reading comprehension, it is helpful to explore the different components that constitute reading comprehension. In the following sections, I will discuss all the different elements of reading comprehension and explore the role that they play in terms of supporting children's learning.

When we examine how best to improve reading comprehension, my new model of teaching reading comprehension will address issues with some of the components identified present for a child. If it appears that short-term memory issues impact on reading comprehension (as indicated in this section) then my new model will address these short-term memory issues. By knowing more about the reasons for reading comprehension difficulties, I will ascertain how my new method addresses these different issues presented.

In profiling children with specific reading comprehension difficulties (Cain and Oakhill, 2006) established that children who present with poor text comprehension but portray fluent and accurate word reading are impaired on a wide range of tasks that are reading-related. The study also aimed to ascertain whether reading comprehension difficulties were associated with more general learning difficulties. Findings revealed that weak vocabulary skills led to impaired development in word reading ability and weak general cognitive ability led to impaired advancement in comprehension. Assessment at eleven years revealed that weak comprehenders obtained lower Standardised Attainment Test

(SAT) scores than did the more advanced comprehenders. The findings indicated that a solitary underlying source of poor comprehension is unlikely. Students who present with poor comprehension ability are at risk of poor educational attainment generally, although poor verbal or cognitive skills appeared to affect the reading development of poor comprehenders in various ways. The study was valid and reliable in terms of the methods that it applied as the skills of text comprehension, word reading, syntax, vocabulary, working memory, cognitive ability, and comprehension subskills were assessed at eight years. Listening comprehension, SAT scores and reasoning scores at eleven years were also reported. The study sample consisted of twenty-three pupils with poor comprehension and twenty three pupils with good comprehension with age-appropriate word reading accuracy who were assessed when aged eight years. Concurrent reading and language performance, educational attainment and reasoning skills three years later were also reported. Another way of looking at reading comprehension has been through Rapid Automatized Naming (RAN).

A study investigating which time components of rapid automatized naming (RAN) predicted group differences between dyslexic and non-dyslexic readers (matched for age and reading level), and how these components related to different reading measures, revealed that the relationship between RAN components and reading ability is dependent on age as well as on reading level (Araújo et al., 2011). Evidence was provided that ‘the process(es) indexed by the RAN inter-item pause time constitute the main source of naming difficulties in dyslexia, whereas the articulation times was unrelated to measures of reading’. These results suggest that ‘the association between RAN inter-item pauses and reading is mediated by factors related to, or subserving, orthographic skills and

orthographic skill development rather than with phonological processing ability' (Araújo et al., 2011:252). The component skills underlying reading fluency require investigation.

Barth et al. (2009) investigated the component skills underlying reading fluency and revealed that naming speed, decoding, and language were uniquely associated with reading fluency. The findings from this study suggested that 'the ability to access and retrieve phonological information from long-term storage is the most important factor in explaining individual differences in reading fluency among adolescent readers' (p.567). The study suggests that adequate word reading accuracy skills is a necessary prerequisite if a reader is to attain fluency. In order that infrequent presentations of a given word in text lead to strong representations of the word in memory, it is necessary that the reader develops strong grapheme–phoneme mapping skills. The ability to process language for meaning has a big influence on Reading Fluency. Students will be better able to comprehend connected text and read it fluently if they are taught teaching comprehension strategies that help them to gain an understanding for words (i.e., vocabulary) and help them to improve sentence and text comprehension. In establishing reading fluency, naming speed as measured by RAN tasks plays a significant role. Interventions should not include rapid automatised naming activities because there is little consensus regarding what RAN tasks measure. As an alternative, interventions should include plenty opportunities to practice reading connected text. The practice of reading connected text will likely result in higher quality phonological and orthographic representations in the student's memory, which will support more precise and potentially faster verbal processing (i.e., the accessing of phonological and orthographic codes from memory) while the student is reading. The rapid naming of objects (rapid automatic naming) tests and phonological awareness tests examining end-sound discrimination concluded that both rapid automatic naming and phonological awareness predicted

reading in the English language throughout the early school years and that the early consideration of these variables were more diagnostic than measures at more advanced ages (Cronin, 2011). The strongest predictors of reading comprehension need to be identified.

Goff et al. (2005) aimed to identify the strongest independent predictors of reading comprehension using memory, language and word reading variables in a normal sample of one hundred and eighty children in grades three to five, with a range of word reading skills. They also investigated the contributions of receptive grammatical skills, exposure to print, visuospatial working memory, reading speed, and verbal learning and retrieval (a measure of longer-term retention). Working memory tasks that necessitated the processing and retention of numerical and spatial material were employed. 'In the exploratory analyses, receptive grammatical skills, exposure to print and verbal learning and retrieval all made small contributions to reading comprehension. However, reading speed did not' (p.607). After controlling for age and general intellectual ability, the results revealed that, the language and the word reading variables had a greater relation with reading comprehension than the memory variables. 'Previous exposure to irregular words is crucial when words are presented in a list rather than as part of a sentence since contextual factors cannot be used to facilitate performance and phonological decoding alone will be unlikely to yield the correct answer for many words. Performance therefore relies on whether the words have been encountered previously either in a written or aural format' (p.608). Orthographic processing is therefore the strongest independent predictor of reading comprehension since it captures variance in both word reading, language skills and verbal working memory. An examination of tasks that measure how new information reconcile with prior learning warrants discussion.

Tasks that measure how new information is combined with information already stored in long-term memory (the interaction between short-term and long-term memory), may be better predictors of reading comprehension measured with the text available than working memory tasks that only have a short-term memory element. This concurs with Nation and Snowling (1998a) who contended that while poor comprehenders can appear to be adequate readers and have normal phonological recoding skills but still reveal difficulty in reading irregular words. The initial phase of this research involved assessing the reading skills of one hundred and seventy two children (ages between eight years, six months and nine years, six months). The strength of the evidence is based on the fact that a reading-age matched design was used to compare children who have specific reading comprehension difficulties with a group of skilled comprehenders matched for chronological age, nonverbal ability and decoding ability. This design allowed the researchers to discount concomitant problems with decoding as a potential explanation of group differences in performance.

The researchers argued that children with poor comprehension have reduced development of their semantic memory system and therefore that reduced sensitivity to contextual information impacts negatively on their ability to read (irregular) words that are typically read with support from semantics. As a result, the word knowledge of poor comprehenders will increasingly remain behind their counterparts with average semantic processing skills.

There is a correlation between spoken language impairment and reading failure. Nation et al. (2004) investigated the oral language skills of eight-year-old children with impaired reading comprehension and provided further support that an over-lap exists between spoken language impairment and reading failure. Some children appeared, superficially

at least, to read well, and serious reading and language impairments were not always obvious in children who have a good ability to decode phonologically. Despite their ability to read fluently and accurately these children were poor at comprehending what they had read. In relation to control, children matched for age and decoding ability, the poor comprehenders were impaired across all measures except those assessing phonological skills. Although low oral language ability characterised the group as a whole, some individuals in addition had marked language impairments. A substantial minority of the cohort were classified as having specific language impairment (SLI), although none of the children had been previously identified as having a language or reading impairment. This evidence highlights the association between poor oral language and reading comprehension failure.

Bishop and Adams (1990) agree that this 'study has highlighted the close relationship between reading comprehension failure and poor oral language abilities, although it is certainly not the case that all children selected as poor comprehenders have significant language difficulties; similarly, not all children with SLI have poor reading comprehension' (p.210). It is proposed that identifying language issues that present themselves before reading develops is critical to early remediation of these difficulties.

Early-emerging language problems that are present before reading develops include difficulties in processing grammatical information in spoken language, deficient performance on general measures of language comprehension weak vocabulary knowledge (Hulme and Snowling, 2011). Even though many of the language difficulties experienced by some children are not serious enough for them to be diagnosed as having a language impairment, however, most of these difficulties are manifested clearly in their reading comprehension issues. 'We should also emphasize that many children experience

difficulties with both word-recognition and language-comprehension skills, and such children may require interventions that address both of these problems' (p.142). However, the cognitive functioning between children presenting with difficulties in maths who were also poor readers needs to be compared.

When selectively comparing the cognitive functioning of children with maths disabilities with average-achieving children and children with reading disabilities or comorbid disabilities (reading disabilities and maths disabilities) no support was found for the notion that the differentiation between children presenting with maths difficulties and who were also poor readers, was related to variations in reading across the reviewed studies (Swanson et al., 2009b).

When research that compared children with and without reading disabilities on measures of short-term memory and working memory was synthesised, the results indicated that in comparison with average readers, children with reading disabilities were particularly disadvantaged on short term memory measures that required the recall of phonemes and digit sequences and on working memory measures that required the simultaneous processing and storage of digits within sentence sequences and final words from unrelated sentences simultaneously (Swanson et al., 2009a). In children presenting with reading disabilities, those aspects of the phonological system that were problematic related to the accurate access to speech codes and those aspects of the executive system that appeared faulty were related to the simultaneous monitoring of cognitive processing and storage demands. Limitations in the working memory operated independently of limitations in phonological processing. Therefore, children with reading disabilities may perform well on specific cognitive tasks because those tasks do not place heavy demands on working memory processing.

Two very different forms of reading problem: decoding difficulties and reading comprehension difficulties may pose difficulties for many children. Problems with phonological (speech sound) processing appear to cause decoding difficulties. In contrast, reading comprehension difficulties appear to be caused by problems with higher order language difficulties in addition to difficulties with semantics (including inadequate knowledge of word meanings) and grammar (knowledge of morphology and syntax). In conclusion, it is necessary that educational interventions be based on the cause of the particular difficulty in order that teaching is fine-tuned to address the particular issue.

Snowling and Hulme (2011) argue that 'any well-founded educational intervention must be based on a sound theory of the causes of a particular form of learning difficulty, which in turn must be based on an understanding of how a given skill is learned by typically developing children' (p.1). Interventions that are phonologically based are effective in ameliorating children's word level decoding difficulties and interventions to boost vocabulary and broader oral language skills remediate reading and oral language comprehension difficulties. The practice of producing a 'virtuous circle' whereby practice is informed by theory, and the evaluation of effective interventions are in turn feeding back to inform and refine theories about the nature and causes of pupil's reading and language difficulties is advocated. Consequently, this evidence base will inform the factors that are necessary for the formulation of an inclusive and comprehensive programme in the teaching of reading.

2.5 Factors necessary for the Formulation of an Inclusive and Comprehensive Programme in the Teaching of Reading

In considering the factors that are necessary in formulating an inclusive and comprehensive programme in the teaching of reading, the inclusion paradigm places

responsibility with the school to make instructional changes in order to accommodate all pupils (King, 2007). In formulating an inclusive programme in the teaching of reading many factors need to be considered. Yet, despite the difficulties which some children present with, Butler and Stillman (2002) suggest that almost all children can be helped to acquire skills in word recognition and comprehension through application of effective teaching methods. Effective readers need to be competent in the following components of reading; phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). These components provide a balanced approach to the teaching of reading, integrating the skills-based approach and the meaning-emphasis approach. They also have a positive influence on the development of the reading-writing link (Ruddell, 2002).

Posing the question that examines if a causal link from competence in phonological awareness leads to successful reading and spelling acquisition revealed that that is not always the case. Raising the questions concerning only whether there is evidence that teaching an explicit awareness of phonemes in isolation from graphemes assists reading acquisition revealed that there is no causal link from competence in phonological awareness to success in reading and the acquisition of spelling (Adams,1990). Phonological awareness precedes and directly influences the process of reading acquisition and it represents a skill specific to spoken language (Castles and Coltheart, 2004). Hence, the importance of teaching letter-sound correspondence is tremendous. Enabling students to master the alphabetic principle provides them with a vital tool for acquiring literacy. The performance differences between good and weak readers may also change over time.

Cain and Oakhill (2011) examined the evidence for Matthew effects in reading and vocabulary between ages eight and eleven years of age in groups of children identified with good and poor reading comprehension at eight years. Matthew effects refers to the phenomenon that performance differences between good and poor readers may increase over a period of time (Stanovich, 1986; Walberg and Tsai, 1983). They also investigated evidence for Matthew effects in reading and vocabulary between eight and sixteen years. For this longitudinal investigation of reading development, one hundred and two children aged seven to eight years were recruited who were assessed in the years of their eighth, eleventh, fourteenth, and sixteenth birthdays.

The weak comprehenders showed reduced development in vocabulary compared to the better comprehenders, but not in word reading or reading comprehension ability. They also acquired lower scores on measures of out-of-school literacy. The analysis of the whole sample concluded that initial levels of reading experience and reading comprehension predicted vocabulary at ages eleven, fourteen, and sixteen after controlling for general ability and vocabulary skills when aged eight.

Slower rates of vocabulary growth were noted in children with specific reading comprehension difficulties than same-age peers with good reading comprehension. There was no increase in differences between the two groups' word reading and reading comprehension skills across time. There was a difference in the reading habits of both groups. The research concluded that both reading habits and reading comprehension were contributing factors to vocabulary growth and development over and above general cognitive ability. This supports the proposal that reading comprehension skills may support vocabulary development and extension and leisure time reading provides opportunities for vocabulary learning. This demonstrates the importance of encouraging

early reading habits and fostering the motivation to read in developing readers which in turn is suggested to enable higher performance in reading comprehension test scores.

Cutting and Scarborough (2006) examined reading comprehension scores from the Wechsler Individual Achievement Tests, the Gates–MacGinitie Reading Test, and the Gray Oral Reading Test in relation to measures of reading, language, and other cognitive skills that have been assumed to contribute to comprehension and give a reason for comprehension differences. In the sample of ninety seven pupils between first and tenth grades, the relative contributions of word recognition or decoding and oral language skills to comprehension differed from test to test. The addition of reading speed accounted for additional difference, but prediction of comprehension scores was marginally improved by including measures of IQ (Intelligence Quotient) verbal memory, rapid serial naming, or attention. The findings suggest that commonly used tests of reading comprehension, such as the three compared in the study, may not utilise the same range of cognitive processes.

They conclude that ‘Given the current state of affairs, special educators and psychologists may need to use multiple reading comprehension measures, therefore, to determine eligibility for special educational services and for planning interventions’(p.295).Thus, measuring and separately analysing several features of oral language proficiency on the nature of reading comprehension and comprehension difficulties is necessary.

There is an implicit assumption that comprehension tests are all measuring the same thing and are therefore often used interchangably. Keenan et al. (2008) examined the validity of this assumption by comparing some of the most popular reading

comprehension assessment measures used in the US. Intercorrelations among the tests examined suggested that they were measuring different skills. ‘As we have shown, when the construct being measured is as complex as comprehension, those instruments can tap different aspects’ (p.298). In light of this, there are serious implications for schools considering that different reading comprehension tests measure different skills, and that sometimes even the same test measures different skills depending on the pupil’s age and ability. In light of this, care needs to be taken when reviewing studies that have used different measures. Comprehension instructional approaches may also be compared and assessed.

McKeown et al. (2009) conducted a two-year study in which standardised comprehension instruction for representations of instruction for strategies and content approaches was designed and implemented. A comparison was made between the effectiveness of the two experimental comprehension instructional approaches (strategies and content) and a control approach. The participating students were form a low-performing urban district and were all fifth graders. Students were taught specific procedures to direct their access to text during reading of the text to develop strategies instruction. The use of open-ended, meaning-based questions about the text was used to focus student attention on the content of the text. Questions available in the teacher’s manual of the basal reading program used in the participating classrooms were used to develop the control approach.

The authors conclude that a ‘major distinction between the two approaches is that strategy instruction encourages students to think about their mental processes and, on that basis, to execute specific strategies with which to interact with text. In contrast, content instruction attempts to engage students in the process of attending to text ideas

and building a mental representation of the ideas, with no direction to consider specific mental processes' (p. 219).They identified that using such strategies as summarisation, cooperative learning, graphic and semantic organisers, story structure, question answering, question generation and comprehension monitoring are all supported by solid evidence for improving comprehension.

Hence, as McKeown et al.(2009) suggest, 'getting students to actively build meaning while reading does not necessitate knowledge of and focus on specific strategies, but, rather it may require attention to text content in ways that promote attending to important ideas and establishing connections between them' (p.245). The notion that strategies instruction is effective and discussion-based practices are effective for reading comprehension enhancement is complemented by the findings of a study conducted by Paris and Paris (2007) that revealed an optimistic message about the potential of early comprehension instruction. The study provided five weeks of direct strategy tuition about narrative elements and relations in four first-grade classrooms, and resources were used that made minimal decoding demands on children's reading. Two comparison classrooms received equivalent tuition on poetry and language development. Pretest and posttest results evidenced that the intervention enhanced narrative meaning-making in listening comprehension and oral production modalities as well as children's comprehension of narratives in the picture-viewing modality. Comprehending the psychological aspects of stories, inference- making skills and understanding and recall of main narrative elements also improved. Regardless of differences in initial skills, the benefits of the intervention appeared to have been equal for the experimental children. No disparity in the patterns of growth were apparent between children who, at the commencement of the intervention, had stronger or weaker phonemic awareness, comprehension, oral language, decoding skills, vocabulary, reading achievement or

motivation. Beginning readers' emerging narrative knowledge in primary grade classrooms can be enhanced and 'by minimizing the burden of decoding and other basic skills, all children can benefit from instruction that is motivating and authentic' (p.33). By minimizing the burden of decoding, teaching that combines semantic and syntactic information that is more motivating is a more authentic means of instruction.

Kintsch and Mangalath, (2011) were concerned with how to present a model of how sentence meanings are constructed as opposed to word meanings. By combining semantic and syntactic information about words stored in long-term memory with local information about the sentence context, they showed how information can be contextualised in working memory. They also presented explicit information about the actual patterns of word use to arrive at sentence interpretations. Long-term memory stores a decontextualized record of experiences with a particular word and does not store the full meaning of a word. Long-term semantic word memory summarises all the experiences a person has had with that word. Therefore, meaning needs to be constructed in context. Meaning is therefore always contextual, created from the interaction between the long-term memory traces and the momentary context that exists in working memory. Therefore we know that reading comprehension is not just a simple matter of the instinctive identification and recognition of words in text (Nation, 2005). It is necessary to discuss how top-down skills support comprehension acquisition.

Comprehension is supported by top-down skills such as those that come under the category of executive functions. Executive functions (Diamond, 2013; Stuss and Alexander, 2000) refer to a group of higher order cognitive mental processes that controls and regulates behaviour. In relation to reading comprehension acquisition, these

processes include higher order skills such as working memory, self-monitoring, inhibition (of irrelevant information), cognitive flexibility and shifting attention. 'Executive functioning is seen as a supporting factor in the learning process and as a critical facilitator for core skills such as reading comprehension' (Reynor, 2018b:11). The role of vocabulary teaching underpinning reading comprehension development must therefore be examined.

2.6 The Role of Vocabulary Teaching

Comprehension is dependent upon strong meaning related skills especially vocabulary (Lesaux and Harris, 2013). Instructional approaches to vocabulary building and strategies to encourage word awareness, enhances the vocabulary development for pupils with reading and learning difficulties. Vocabulary instruction should include provision of both explicit and incidental teaching and learning of words, instruction in word-learning strategies, providing repeated exposure to words that have been already learned, enabling children to access new words in different contexts, selecting words used frequently (high-frequency words) for instruction and encouraging active pupil dialogue and engagement with words (Reynor, 2014). The Reading Systems Framework highlights the significance of word knowledge.

The Reading Systems Framework is a wide-angled view of reading comprehension which places word knowledge in the centre of the picture. Word-to-text integration processes (those that make sense out of short stretches of text) can serve as a model for the study of local comprehension processes within this framework (Perfetti and Stafura, 2014). This model proposes that the reader generates a mental image of the text, also known as a situation model, which enables the integration of text information with the reader's prior knowledge (Kintsch, 2013). These processes also allow readers to

continuously modify and update their current comprehension. Pupils demonstrating skilled comprehension ability portray immediate use of word meanings in the integration process. In contrast, children presenting with dyslexia need plenty opportunity for the integration of language skills.

Investigating reading and cognitive profiles of children with dyslexia highlight the continuing need for a focus on the development language skills for these children is necessary, as phonological difficulties, reading comprehension and language skills are a recurring challenge for those with dyslexia (Reynor, 2018a). There is a need for these challenges to be targeted specifically in the early years of primary school because language and comprehension are meaning related skills and they are inextricably linked with children's growth as readers. Developing rich vocabulary through oral language, reading, and writing instruction is therefore essential (Kucan, 2012). This will be incorporated in my new model when it is outlined further in the thesis. It might seem that good pedagogical skills alone are sufficient in the teaching of reading and comprehension instruction, however, we must examine the theories underpinning them.

2.7 Theories Underpinning the Reading Process: The Models of Reading

Components of the three most prominent models of reading that are applied within the Irish context are taken from the Skills-Based Approach, the Meaning-Emphasis Approach and the Simple View of Reading (Department of Education and Skills, 2015), therefore each of these models will be reviewed in detail here. Later in this section, models relating to teaching children with dyslexia and SEN will be explored. If it turns out that such models (following my critical evaluation) would appear to be crucial in a class context for understanding how to teach children with reading comprehension

difficulties, teaching practice may need to be changed, and elements of these theories might well need a place in my new model.

A critical and analytical approach is necessary to evaluate the conflicting theories that underpin the various approaches to teaching reading. Each one presents its own strengths and challenges by indicating different principles of instruction and each is supported by a different research base (Collins-Block and Parris, 2008). Proponents of single word reading (which is the capacity to identify single written words accurately and fluently is the fundamental process in reading (Seymour, 2008)), break down the process into knowledge and skills. The development of early reading is broken down into three distinct phases: the logographic, the alphabetic and the orthographic stages (Frith, 1985; PDST, 2014). Lerner (2006), identifies the following five stages; the logographic, early alphabetic, mature alphabetic, orthographic and finally the gaining of fluency. The logographic stage and early alphabetic stages involve the recognition of the letters of the alphabet and a knowledge that individual written characters or letters represent sounds. In the logographic phase the word outline/salient features are important. The logographic skill is intact in children who present with dyslexia. The logographic phase is very suitable for children whose working memory is functioning in the area of processing visual and spatial information. The mature alphabetic stage involves the consolidating of the concept of phonological awareness. Phonological awareness is 'an ability to recognise, combine and manipulate the different sound units of spoken words' (Department of Education and Training in Western Australia, 2004:73). The alphabetic stage is very difficult for many children presenting with reading difficulties due to the letter patterns in the English language being phonologically unreliable. The orthographic stage involves the learning of the conventions for writing a language. It includes spelling, hyphenation, capitalisation, word breaks, emphasis, punctuation and grammar. In the

orthographic phase, internal word patterns are important and this enables a child with reading difficulties to see similar patterns when learning words. The gaining of fluency is the ability to read with expression and meaning and with accuracy and at an appropriate speed (PDST, 2014). Garcia and Pearson (1991) proposed that the models of reading instruction should be divided into four general approaches: direct instruction, explicit explanation, cognitive apprenticeship, and whole language. Direct instruction means that reading can be broken down into a set of sub-skills that can be identified. It suggests that when these sub-skills are taught directly they will improve a child's ability to read. Although similar to direct instruction, explicit explanation places great emphasis on practicing the reading strategy being taught in the context of reading the text. Explicit explanation allows for the gradual release of responsibility from the teacher to the student. This means that after describing the skill/strategy/reading behaviour and explicitly modelling it, the student is then encouraged to assist the teacher to implement the skill/strategy/reading behaviour in the context of the whole class setting. Finally, the children are encouraged to implement the use of the skill/strategy or reading behaviour in future lessons. In the cognitive apprenticeship approach, the role of the teacher is to scaffold the learning and then withdraw support as the pupils are then able to proceed independently. Teachers and students work together to comprehend the text and teachers use the techniques of questioning, summarising clarifying and predicting to enable the student to comprehend the text. Proponents of the whole-language approach (Goodman, 1967) propose that both written and oral language should be learned for authentic purposes and not breaking language down into its component parts. Teaching should take place in response to students needs as they are attempting to use language for the purpose of communication in contrast to the teacher planning instruction. These approaches are incorporated in the skills based approach and the meaning-emphasis approach to the

teaching of reading. These stages and approaches are inextricably linked in that they should not be viewed as neatly separated or self-contained.

When the ultimate goal of reading is considered, which is the understanding or comprehension of what is read, these models help in the discovery of the kinds of information-processing activities that go on in peoples' minds when they read. This is necessary because the reading process in multi-dimensional and complex (Kennedy et al., 2012). For effective teaching to take place, an understanding of this complexity is necessary so that an appropriate range of teaching approaches are implemented to produce confident readers. This understanding also helps in the discovery of the structure and organisation of the cognitive system skilled readers have acquired from learning to read; one such approach is the skills-based approach to reading.

2.8 The Skills-Based Approach

The skills-based approach (Pressley, 2006) stresses the importance of teaching children the skills necessary for decoding and interpreting text in order that they will at a later stage, be enabled to comprehend what they are reading. Similar to the stages outlined by Frith (1985) this approach acknowledges awareness of the development of a conceptual knowledge of the nature of written language and its relationship to the spoken word and thus helps to foster the development of reading comprehension. It acknowledges how print functions, the form of print and the realisation that spoken words can be broken down into sounds or phonemes. The skills-based approach to reading helps to develop comprehension skills and strategies to facilitate the processing of texts (Kelly, 2008).

Children with reading comprehension problems find the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language a great challenge (Cogan, 2017). It can be proposed that the decoding of words

and the processing of those words in relation to one another to understand the many small ideas in the text poses difficulty for a child with SEN. The process of generating questions heightens children's awareness of reading comprehension in a number of ways but is difficult for a child presenting with comprehension difficulties as these children often do not have the ability to generate questions and are less active in the reading process. Reading strategies often employed by children with SEN are effortful, deliberate, active, goal-directed, conscious and purposeful on the part of the reader in order to construct meaning from text. This is in contrast to the skills exhibited by a proficient reader which are characterised by automaticity, fluency, effortlessness and effectiveness. It is a challenge for children with SEN to shift seamlessly between the automatic use of a reading skill to the effortful use of a reading strategy. In summary, the aim is to develop readers who are strategic, motivated and set goals for reading. They demonstrate the skill of selectively attending, making inferences, and integrating information across texts. They activate and connect with prior knowledge, attend to text structure, visualise, ask questions of the text, determine importance, critically evaluate as they read, retell information, summarise and synthesise as they read. They demonstrate the ability process text before, during and after reading. Therefore, in my research, I examined how teachers enabled their pupils with SEN to integrate these skills and I used the Skills-Based Approach to inform my inquiry.

In contrast to the skills-based approach, the cognitive apprenticeship model outlined by Collins et al. (1989) is based on constructivist ideas about learning and it focuses not so much on basic knowledge and skills, but on the process of learning and on more complex skills and metacognitive skills such as those involved in comprehending text. This model suggests that reading is the orchestration of complex processes. However, there is not full agreement with this and the essential point for the reader is that researchers such as

Brown et al. (1989) do not concur with this perspective. Brown et al. warn that teaching these complex processes such as the cognitive activities involved in reading, in a skill by skill, fashion creates a distorted view of the reading process therefore limiting comprehension. Due to the over-reliance on the acquisition of skills alone, enjoyment of reading may be lost as a child struggles to decipher the text on a page without extracting any real meaning, thus comprehension is compromised and not conducive to inclusion (King, 2006). Within my research I examined if the use of comprehension strategies encourage successful reading in pupils presenting with SEN.

Stahl (1997:2) concedes that 'direct-instruction proponents assume that reading can be decomposed into identifiable sub skills that, when taught directly, will improve children's reading ability'. According to research conducted by Meyer (1983) direct instruction programmes are most effective when they are used in conjunction with wide reading thus enhancing comprehension. In breaking down language into components that are taught in isolation the direct instruction approach therefore does not enhance the learning of reading within its meaningful context hence comprehension is also compromised.

In direct instruction, the assumption is made that, as the learner becomes better able to use a particular strategy, then their use of that strategy while reading will become automatic (Kameenui et al., 1997). However, it should be noted that children presenting with SEN often encounter great difficulty in making this transfer (Ott, 1997). The emphasis on practising the strategy in the context of reading the text is therefore a strength of the explicit explanation model as it leads the pupil along the continuum from the responsibility for using the strategy lying with the teacher to the pupil independently using the strategy themselves; it is therefore a more inclusive model. This approach presents a contrasting approach to the whole language or meaning-emphasis approach

(see section 2.9) which advocates that oral language is learned without direct instruction because it serves a purpose for the learner (Keene and Zimmermann, 2007).

2.9 The Meaning–Emphasis Approach

Approaches to reading comprehension that engage children in discussion of texts are proposed to also be effective for children with SEN as this is an area that poses a challenge for them (King, 2006). It can be proposed that teachers should enable the child to utilise a range of cognitive processes, such as locate and recall, integrate and interpret, and critique and evaluate in order to process a text. Identifying texts on topics in which children have an interest and teaching strategies within the context of a real book has significant potential for fostering the type of language development that is linked to literacy. Joint attention of children and adult on the picture/text provides opportunities for the adult to encourage the use of complex language and to extend the child's language (Barry, 2005). This includes explaining, using descriptions, dialogue about past experiences, predicting and making inferences regarding what may happen next in the text. Engaging children in interactive discussion and dialogue about the text is a key goal for the teacher. However, the discussion must engage children in discussing their understandings and ideas about the story that they are constructing and co-constructing 'as the story is being read'. Therefore, in my research, I examined how teachers enabled their pupils with SEN to integrate these skills and I used the Meaning - Emphasis Approach as a basis on which to inform this inquiry.

The interweaving of the semantic, syntactic and grapho-phonic cue-systems brings the disciplines of psychology and linguistics together in this meaning-emphasis approach to the teaching of reading. Semantics refers to the meanings in language, syntactic is the grammatical arrangement of words in a sentence grapho-phonic cues systems refer to the

letter-sound or sound-symbol relationships of language. The meaning-emphasis approach originated with Kenneth Goodman (1967) who described reading as a psycholinguistic guessing game in which skilled readers use their knowledge of language (vocabulary and syntax) together with knowledge of the topic, to predict many of the words on the page, thus enabling the development of comprehension. This ability to predict is an important element in comprehension which is highly interactive and reciprocal in its nature. As this is the way in which skilled readers operate, this approach advocates the need for even beginning readers to learn to use the same 'guess-from-meaning' strategy. A key belief underpinning this approach is that children learn to read in much the same way as they learn to use speech to communicate. In this context it is only when meaning is lost that the reader resorts to the phonic principle.

The psycholinguists 'cue systems' model which Goodman (1967) identified underpins a 'whole language' perspective. The strength of this model lies in its recognition of the broader view of reading. While it recognises that words and letters are still important it does not dismiss the other information which children bring to reading and encompasses the need for comprehension development. Not all models of the reading process, however, adopt knowledge and skills versus the meaning-emphasis approach and many espouse to the interweaving of the two approaches. Finding the best match between the epistemology of an approach and the best understanding of the nature of reading instruction is not easy. Epistemology is the study of meaning, so I interpret epistemology of approach as the underpinning philosophy of the approach/theory and the way that one actually teaches it. This point is important to the understanding of my study, as it will acknowledge that comprehension teaching can be conducted within a meaningful context using strategies which incorporate the meaning-emphasis approach to reading. This was

ascertained by asking teachers how they addressed the issue of using comprehension strategies to encourage successful reading in the inclusive classroom.

Many approaches to reading instruction do not even resemble authentic reading done outside of school. One of the key components that has been identified in reading and in learning to read is reading fluency. Difficulties in reading fluency is a contributory factor to the presence of reading difficulties (Rasinski et al., 2009). More authentic approaches to fluency instruction, such as approaches that employ that texts are meant to be practiced and performed are advocated. Thus the concept of students working on individual reading skills until a certain level of proficiency is achieved and then progressing to the next reading skill, with little attention given to how these various parts come together in real-life reading distorts reading fluency.

Although many children need direct and intensive instruction, however, we should ask what form this direct and intensive instruction should take and for what purpose should it be employed. ‘The keys to the development of reading fluency include modeling fluent reading for students and providing students with repeated reading practice of written passages, while at the same time providing assistance and coaching in the repeated reading’(p.203). Using resources such as scripts, songs and poetry helps pupils to enhance their appreciation for and develop a love of the written language that is not always present in other forms of written communication. Recreating the voice of the author will enable the audience listening to the performance of the text read aloud, to more fully appreciate the meaning that is conveyed in the tone of voice, expression and intonation of the reader.

Enabling development in our understanding of a model exploring the explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies within a Do-Read-Do model, a study conducted by Concannon-Gibney and McCarthy (2012), aimed to present this model that attempted to embed the explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies within a science investigation, thus enabling students' application of reading comprehension strategies.

One particular teaching style called the gradual release of responsibility model which is a structured method of pedagogy framed around a process devolving responsibility within the learning process from the teacher to the eventual independence of the learner **(**Pearson and Gallagher, 1983) was employed. Positive aspects of the initiative advocated the use of this gradual release of responsibility model that consisted of modelling, opportunities to practically apply the new methodology and plenty opportunity for dialogue and reflection. Teachers and students working collaboratively using specific reading strategies, promotes students improved efficacy with reading comprehension of nonfiction text and highlights the importance of metacognition and inquiry stance.

2.10 The Triangle Model of Reading

According to the Triangle Model (Adams, 1990), reading is the outcome of a process that involves interactions between the sounds of words, their spellings and their meanings. An assumption of the model is that, at the initial stages of reading development, the child's cognitive resources are devoted to establishing the so called phonological pathway which is a system for mapping letters onto sounds. The foundation is thereby laid for decoding both real words and pseudo words. Acquiring the three main components of the alphabetic principle: awareness of the phonemic structure of speech, knowledge of letter sounds, and appreciation of the links between letters and sounds in

the orthography (Catts and Kamhi, 2005), enables the establishment of the phonological pathway.

The Triangle Model of Reading is proposed to be suitable for children presenting with reading difficulties as the phonological and orthographic processors work together to decode unfamiliar words. The context processor then provides support to the meaning processor to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words. This enables linguistic knowledge, meaning of words and enhances language development. The orthographic processor processes information from the visual sequence of letters to form words. The orthographic processor is the direct, visual route to reading and a sight vocabulary. The phonological processor enables information from letter sound correspondence to form words. It supports the phonological and working memory weaknesses of the majority of children with dyslexia. However, phonological processing involves assembling sounds to form words. It is slow, indirect and at the sub-word level. It is therefore advisable to use phonological processor after visual vocabulary has been established.

With no clear consensus as to the nature of the relationship between specific literacy skills and oral vocabulary, Ouellette, (2006) sought to distinguish between depth of vocabulary knowledge and vocabulary breadth to better explain the role of oral vocabulary in a range of reading skills. A sample of sixty developmentally average grade four students was assessed on measures of reading comprehension, visual word recognition, receptive and expressive vocabulary breadth, depth of vocabulary knowledge and decoding. Concurrent investigation revealed that each of the above diverse reading skills was related to the vocabulary measures in a distinctive way. After controlling for age and nonverbal intelligence, the only oral vocabulary variable that predicted decoding performance was receptive vocabulary breadth. Visual word

recognition was predicted by expressive vocabulary breadth in contrast to reading comprehension being predicted by depth of vocabulary knowledge. 'Within the framework of vocabulary presented here, semantics is seen as depth of vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, one may hypothesize that according to a triangle model of word reading, depth of vocabulary knowledge can be directly related to decoding proficiency' (p.556). This highlights the fact that reading is comprised of many components and hence a comprehensive assessment of reading ability should include reflection on the elements of reading comprehension, visual word recognition and decoding.

However, a limitation of the triangle model is that it directs its attention to single-word reading. This further compounds the difficulties associated with dyslexia, as limitations of verbal short term memory and problems associated with phonological awareness constitute the most consistently reported phonological difficulties found in dyslexia (Snowling, 2000).

2.11 The Dual Route Model of Reading

The dual-route model (Coltheart, 1978) proposes that skilled readers have at their disposal two different processes for converting print to speech. One route is by the whole word method and the second route is the phonics route which is a common (and successful according to some research) route for those children who do not have specific learning difficulties or speech and language issues.

The first route called the lexical semantic route, goes through the lexicons and the semantic system. The second route is called the letter-to-sound conversion rule procedure or the sublexical route because the sound of a word is produced by mapping sublexical letter units for example graphemes and syllables onto sounds without consulting the

lexicon. According to this dual-route model, oral reading can be accomplished through the lexical semantic route, the sublexical route, or collaboration between the two.

However, it is not possible for word reading to be achieved by this route because sublexical rules cannot be applied to irregular words. Children with poor comprehension ability are unlikely to achieve correct word reading by the semantic route. Hence, it may be argued that a direct route is needed for accessing the pronunciation of words without accessing semantic information.

Cox (1991:133) proposed that 'Reading is much more than the decoding of black marks upon a page; it is a quest for meaning and one which requires the reader to be an active participant.' By adopting this approach, it was envisaged that assimilating phonic (sound and spelling) knowledge; grammatical knowledge; word recognition and graphic knowledge; and knowledge of context would seek to incorporate the whole complexity of reading thus comprehension would be enhanced. These four cue-systems or 'searchlights' are strategies that readers use when addressing text and they call upon these sources of knowledge in order to illuminate their processing. This model underpins the whole-language perspective and was adapted by the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) in 1998 in the United Kingdom (UK) and thus the 'searchlights model' came into being. According to Graham and Kelly (2008:4) this model 'depicted reading as a process of shedding light on the text by means of a range of 'searchlights'. However the Final Report of the Independent Review of Early Reading (The Rose Report) (DfES, 2006) states that:

> we think that further progress towards the goal of using evidence derived from psychological research to inform teaching practice will be better achieved if the

> searchlights model is now reconstructed into the two components of reading (word recognition, language comprehension) that are present but confounded within it (p.75).

The implication of this statement is that word recognition and language comprehension should form the basis of a reading programme. However, in relation to this, one must remain aware of the progress made in the understanding of each components' usefulness in informing the practice of teaching. It is necessary that these components are an integral part of any reading programme, otherwise its effectiveness might be compromised (Washtell, 2008). Therefore, this model should be advocated for practice in schools. A whole language approach involves the implementation of the meaning-emphasis approach as well and in order to support this, providing real literature and books is very important for children. Pressley (1998) concludes that a child's reading development is enhanced in many ways when the whole language approach is skilfully implemented. The whole language approach complements the meaning-emphasis approach and this embodies many teaching strategies such as reading good literature to students every day and providing real literature and books. Providing time for shared reading, for example, within a class context is excellent for children. Shared reading was a concept developed by Holdaway (1979). He also advised parents to establish a good "bed-time routine" for children involving the reading of a story thus enhancing literacy skills. Within my research, I examined the extent to which parents feel enabled to assist their children with the development of reading comprehension skills. Guided Reading is also an effective way of developing a strategic, reflective and critical approach in children. It addresses the need to help students become efficient in comprehending text of various levels of complexity (DfEE, 1998).

According to this approach, children learn to read best by reading and this concurs with the findings of Stanovich (1992) who concludes that automaticity and speed of reading is

delayed in the less skilled reader due to a lack of practice and exposure. The teaching of the necessary skills of comprehension such as understanding, analysis, deduction, summarization, inference, prediction, confirmation, synthesis and evaluation are also important factors in an inclusive and comprehensive reading programme and in light of this the context is set for the acknowledgement of the ‘simple view’ of reading (Lerner, 2006). This alternative 'linear' model takes a different approach by placing emphasis at the outset on 'word recognition' processes, 'learning to read' and 'language comprehension' processes.

This purpose is the enhancement of comprehension. In explicit explanation the gradual release from teacher to pupil of the responsibility for the execution of a strategy consolidates a deeper “ownership” of the use of the strategy and as a result comprehension is better enhanced. In practice the cognitive-apprenticeship models share many components with whole-language instruction in that they both treat the task of reading holistically; and they do not teach sub-skills in isolation (DfES, 2006). In the teaching of reading, isolating a strategy often distorts it, making it difficult to use in “real” reading thus comprehension is restricted (Hall, 2003).The meaning- emphasis approach stresses that reading should be a thinking process and driven ‘top-down’ by a search for meaning in which different cue-systems are orchestrated (Goodman, 1967). Therefore, a pertinent question within my research was to examine how the teaching of reading comprehension as a learning skill in content areas is achieved within the inclusive setting.

2.12 The Simple View

The simple view is a further model that espouses adopting a holistic approach to teaching comprehension, because the basic argument is made that reading comprehension is

influenced by decoding and listening comprehension (Callinan, 2019). This model highlights the fact that if a teacher wants to help a reader, then the focus of assessments and instructional interventions must be on either or both of these elements (Svensson, 2008). This simple view can be described as a holistic model as it also places emphasis on the role of spoken language i.e. vocabulary. This is important because the simple view of reading provides a valid conceptual framework placing emphasis on language comprehension processes and on word recognition processes as essential components during the development of reading and in skilled reading (Hoover and Gough, 1990). In essence, in order to comprehend the content of a written text, the learner reader must firstly learn to recognise or decode the words on a page. Central to this debate are the findings of studies conducted by Gough and Tunmer (1986) who identified 'decoding' and 'comprehension' as the two components of the 'simple view of reading'. By 'decoding' they mean the ability to 'decode' or recognise words which are presented singly and out of the context of a sentence. To this end the application of phonic rules is a necessary contributing factor in the development of word recognition ability which is context free. By 'comprehension' they mean *linguistic* comprehension as opposed to reading comprehension. In addition, studies conducted by Nation and Snowling (1998b) are consistent with the view that oral and written language comprehension often depends on the same underlying language comprehension system as listening and reading comprehension.

Word reading (or decoding) refers to the capability to read a single word out of context. Language comprehension refers to the capacity to understand words, sentences, and text. The Simple View of Reading means that variation in reading ability can be encapsulated (simply) in only two components: word reading (decoding) and language comprehension. Hence, the name, The Simple View of Reading does not imply that

reading (or learning how to read) is a simple process, but, rather, that it is a simple way of conceptualising the complexity of the reading process.

By posing the question 'what is comprehension?' (Cain, Oakhill and Elbro, 2015) considered the necessity for comprehension of different units of language: the understanding of single words, sentences, and connected prose and outlined what readers (and listeners) need to do to successfully comprehend an extended text. Thus, the multiple complex skills in reading can be divided in two groups: those that support word reading (decoding) and also those that support language comprehension.

The Simple View of Reading claims that although word reading and language comprehension are largely independent sets of skills, both, however are absolutely necessary for reading (text comprehension). The skills of word reading ability, vocabulary knowledge, syntactic skills, memory, and discourse level skills such as the ability to make inferences, knowledge about text structure, and metacognitive skills all contribute to successful reading comprehension. The growth of these skills (or their precursors) in pupils at the pre-reading stage, provides the foundation for the development of reading comprehension. Positive reader characteristics for instance, interest and motivation can also influence the comprehension process.

In a study where decoding and comprehension's contribution to reading ability was studied both in children with reading difficulties and in children with average reading ability, the results demonstrated that decoding made the largest contribution to reading ability for children who presented with reading difficulties, while language comprehension contributed the most for children of average reading ability (Gustafson et al., 2013).

This suggests that a more complex theory may be needed to explain reading for children with difficulties in learning to read than the original simple view of reading. This also concurs with findings that children with more general reading difficulties benefit from broad interventions that have a combination of several different bottom-up processes, as well as top-down processes (Gustafson et al., 2011).

The simple view is useful to practitioners in that the clear differentiation between the two dimensions provides a framework that makes explicit that different types of teaching are needed to develop word recognition skills from those that are needed to develop the comprehension of spoken and written language. However, it must also be recognised that the task of word reading is generally achieved as a result of direct instruction. Graham and Kelly (2008) assert that:

> in contrast to orchestration models, the 'simple' model views learning to read as starting with an early short, focused delivery of phonics teaching, which then gives way to lifelong work on comprehension (p. 5).

However, in order to enhance comprehension, this short, focused delivery of phonics teaching as outlined in the 'simple view' should take place within the context of reading and not through words presented singly out of context as this task is often a major challenge for children especially those children presenting with SEN. According to Goodman (1967) over-reliance on phonics teaching without sufficient cognizance of language experience creates little progress in the area of comprehension. While decoding skills may enable comprehension, they do not however, ensure it. Word recognition (decoding) is influenced by a pupil's knowledge of words and language.

A study conducted by Catts et al. (2006) examined concurrently and retrospectively the language abilities of students with specific reading comprehension deficits and compared

them to average readers and children with specific decoding deficits. Data was collected for the same children when they had been tested in kindergarten and in second and in fourth grade. The retrospective analysis revealed that the poor comprehenders presented with poor language scores at all of these previous test times. This is evidence that these children had a stable language deficit and one that might conceivably be an origin of their problems in comprehending what they read.

The results revealed that pupils who demonstrated poor comprehension had concurrent deficits in language comprehension but normal abilities in phonological processing while poor decoders were characterised by the opposite pattern of language abilities. The children with reading comprehension impairment showed deficits on a wide range of language measures. The poor comprehenders demonstrated normal performance on measures of phonological skills, in contrast with children with decoding difficulties who showed some deficits on these measures but not on measures of understanding of listening comprehension, grammar and vocabulary. These results support the Simple View of Reading and indicate that a classification system that is based on the Simple View has advantages over usual programmes that concentrate only on word recognition and/or reading comprehension.

These deficits may be present from the early school years, although they may not always be evident. Poor comprehenders may be differentiated from poor decoders, on the basis of the language comprehension deficits and their strengths in word reading and phonological processing. Poor comprehenders and poor decoders may be less clearly differentiated on the basis of reading comprehension in the early years. This may be a result of the changing nature of reading comprehension. These findings may pose problems for schools implementing a classification system intended to place weak

readers in subgroups on the basis of reading comprehension. Such a system might lead to the identification of poor comprehenders (or poor decoders) at one class level that may not have the same reading profile at another class level.

Therefore, in my research, I examined how teachers enable their pupils with SEN to integrate these skills and I used the aforementioned models to inform my enquiry. With my focus being on comprehension, combining the elements of the skills-based approach, the meaning-emphasis approach and the simple view created a framework for holistic practice in the teaching of reading comprehension ensuring that no approach was missing. Although these are contrasting models, it is possible to bring the elements of these models together in a compatible way by way of developing a reading programme that is conducive to the development of reading skills for children with SEN as outlined in the conclusion chapter of this thesis.

While the Simple View of Reading serves a useful function as a broad framework within which to conceptualise reading comprehension by emphasising the importance of both listening comprehension and decoding, however, there are several outstanding issues that the simple view of reading research must address. These include: the role of strategies, fluency, illustrations and second language in reading comprehension (Kirby and Savage, 2008). Continued efforts (as espoused by my research) are required to articulate a complete theory of the cognitive processes involved in reading. This will result in instructional programme development (in terms of both curriculum and teacher education) and develop evidence based approaches that have the potential to optimise literacy performance for all children.

Research conducted by Ouellette and Beers (2010) served to clarify the best way to conceptualise the components of the simple view of reading and clarify the relationship amongst irregular word recognition, listening comprehension, serial decoding and aspects of oral vocabulary and reading comprehension in two cohorts of children in grades one and six.

Vocabulary was found to explain reading comprehension in grade six but not grade one, even when all other measures were controlled. Vocabulary also predicted irregular word recognition in grades one and six and decoding in grade six. The significance of oral vocabulary, to reading comprehension, decoding and visual word recognition, suggests that a not-so-simple model may be required to justify these complex relationships across development. Hence, the simple view is a simple overview, and not necessarily a detailed model (Kirby and Savage, 2008). Thus, a not-so-simple view of the concepts fundamental to reading comprehension that acknowledges complex links between oral language and print skills is supported.

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000), an initiative of the federal government of the United States of America (USA), reported the importance of teaching reading comprehension strategies when considering best practice in the area of reading instruction. This evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction strongly points towards the effectiveness of teaching reading comprehension strategies as being critically important in the development of children's reading skills and as an aid to understanding what they are reading. In light of this, the role of teacher preparation and instruction in comprehension strategy teaching must be addressed.

2.13 The Role of Teacher Preparation and Comprehension Strategies Instruction

In order to adopt good inclusive practice for students presenting with SEN, Barry (2005) advises teachers to become more familiar with the intricacies of developmentally appropriate practices. There is a great need for teachers and educators to have substantial knowledge of the strategies which are most effective for the teaching of literacy in general and especially in the area of reading comprehension. This is relevant for the issue of teacher preparation in order that teachers will have knowledge of the skills and strategies that are essential to effective literacy teaching.

Teachers must be skilled in their teaching and able to respond in a flexible way to students' needs for instructive feedback as they read (The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000; DES, 2013). In light of this statement, it can be deduced that an important factor contributing to the success of teaching reading comprehension is that teachers should have solid preparation to deliver comprehension strategy instruction. This supports the notion that teacher effectiveness is conducive to the development of reading comprehension. Darling-Hammond (1998) referring to teacher quality and student achievement, found that teacher expertise is by far the single most important determinant of pupil performance, accounting for 40% of the difference in overall pupil performance in reading ability. The document Guidelines for Primary Schools Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools (DES, 2017) emphasised that the quality of teaching is the most critical factor in enhancing pupils' learning and educational experiences. Due to this proposal I examined if teachers felt adequately prepared to successfully teach reading comprehension strategies to children presenting with SEN.

In relation to reading ability performance the findings of research studies conducted in this area by Eivers et al. (2005), which were carried out within the Irish context, were documented in a report entitled 'Succeeding in Reading? - Reading Standards in Irish Primary Schools'. This report summarised the findings of the 2004 National Assessment of English Reading (NAER) in Irish primary schools, dating back to 1972. It compared Fifth class pupil performance in 2004 with that of pupils assessed in NAER 1998 and concluded that the overall reading standards of Fifth class pupils had not changed since 1998. The teachers of almost one in five pupils described themselves as not familiar with the Learning-Support Guidelines (DES, 2000) while less than half of teachers had contributed to their school's policy on the provision of learning support. The teachers of over one quarter of pupils felt that there was little or no intergration between a pupil's learning in class and in the learning support context, or did not know if there was any integration at all. Eivers et al. (2005) recommend that teachers require additional support in their teaching of reading comprehension skills as well as on placing greater emphasis on planning reading, writing and oral language skills designed to enhance pupils' comprehension of text. In relation to factors linked with better achievement in the acquisition of effective reading comprehension strategies, the study also found that teacher attendance at continuous professional development (CPD) courses in this area had a positive effect on reading comprehension scores. Within my research I focussed on asking participants what is the role of teacher preparation in the development of reading comprehension skills for pupils with SEN in order to explore this more deeply.

Studies by Taylor et al. (2002) also concur with the argument that teachers need to be adequately and appropriately prepared to effectively teach reading comprehension. In an outline of the factors which lead to improvement in this area Taylor et al highlight teacher proficiency in the use of a range of word-recognition strategies and the

appropriate use of higher level questioning skills. This can only be achieved by the effective preparation of teachers in their endeavours to meet all the challenges encountered by children when they are faced with obstacles and barriers to comprehension when they are reading. In addition to this, the role which parents can provide in assisting this cannot be over emphasised.

2.14 The Parental Role in Reading

Empirical research has been shown to support the development of specific home activities that enables the progression of key aspects of emergent literacy. The areas of emergent literacy that contribute to reading skills include phonological awareness, letter/alphabetic knowledge, print concepts, vocabulary and word recognition. Devotion to the activity of shared book reading in the home, positively impacts emergent literacy and word recognition skill (Evans and Shaw, 2008). Evans and Shaw highlight that parents 'frequently and naturally will better have an opportunity to observe their child's skill level and fine-tune their interactions to increase child interest and participation' (p.93).

Parents can enable themselves to develop prerequisite skills to support their children's reading development. Activities can include nurturing the child's independent reading level during which the parent can be reading coach. Teaching letter names and sounds, attracting the child's attention to print and its form and purpose collectively enable the development of parent– child writing activities. Shared book reading using alphabet and rhyming books enable the expansion of vocabulary.

Within the UK context in the 1960s, the association between lack of books in the home and school achievement was highlighted in the Plowden Report (CACE, 1967). Research

has shown that home factors have a great bearing on school literacy attainment according to the National Child Development Study carried out within the UK by Davie et al. (1972). Studies carried out by Tizard et al. (1982), Beverton et al. (1993) and Poulson et al. (1997) concur with these findings. Smith (1997) conducted a longitudinal study measuring children's emergent literacy knowledge at the time of entering pre-school and discovered a strong positive relationship to their reading ability five years later. Hannon (1995) notes the importance of involving parents in literacy teaching whereby parents would be enabled to support their children's literacy learning at home but recognises that the theoretical understandings of why and how to do it has often lagged behind practice. This concurs with the findings of Applebee et al. (1998) within the USA context. Therefore, the case for parental involvement, based on results of research into literacy development and home learning should be persuasively argued and a theoretical framework to underpin practice put forward. In relation to this, an important element of my research was to identify strategies that foster and develop reading comprehension skills not only within the inclusive school setting but also within the context of home based literacy.

Supporting the notion of parental involvement in her comprehensive account of the development of English as a school subject, Poulson (1998) states 'Children's initial induction into literacy in the early years is largely the job of the primary school, in partnership with home and the wider community' (p.10). In relation to teaching children from disadvantaged communities, Sylva (2000:133) recommends that 'curriculum and pedagogy would shift away from the current stress in the UK on formal academic preparation and towards the development of social skills and commitment to the learning community.' Successful early childhood intervention programmes have positive implications for future learning (Sylva, 2000).

Sunderland (2000) addresses the philosophy and psychology underpinning the therapeutic value of storytelling and suggests that story telling is a good way in which families can help children to discuss their feelings. Meek (1988:7) who advocates the concept of family literacy warns that 'many early reading skills can be missed by teachers whose training has been strictly geared to 'schooling' literacy.' Meek (1991:110) states that 'Reading to children before they go to school is now widely and, I think, wisely recommended.' Parents who were involved in a project where they were helped to enhance their children's literacy skills considered it a powerful learning tool for them and also for their children (Weinberger and Stafford, 2004; DES, 2009).

2.15 Provision, Practice and Curriculum

Central to the debate on provision, practice and curriculum central to my research is the notion of inclusive pedagogy and personalised learning which must be addressed within this arena. Sebba and Ainscow (1996) describe inclusion as the process by which a school endeavours to respond to its pupils as individuals by reconsidering the organisation and provision of its curriculum. However, a major challenge facing schools is the realisation that teachers alone cannot do all that needs to be done and I have found this to be the case within my own teaching context also. A few isolated changes in the teaching and learning environments of individual teachers cannot amount to inclusive education. Within the Irish context in 1993 the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) report highlighted deficiencies in curricular provision for pupils with SEN and recommended that success depends, to a significant extent, on whole-school organisational arrangements and on the effectiveness of strategies for teaching and learning that teachers implement in their classrooms.

The SERC report recommended that a support infrastructure for schools should be established through the creation of a School Psychological Service. This service identifies children presenting with SEN through the medium of a psychological assessment similar to the "statement of need" within the UK context and as a result resources would be provided for the school to support such children thus identified. However, the tensions which this may provoke needs to be addressed. These include how support arrangements should be provided, how the curriculum should be adapted, how social difficulties and logistic challenges will be addressed and how the pupils themselves will be enabled to become their own advocates by articulating what *they* want. Structured whole school induction is therefore crucial in establishing an effective support framework for pupils and it should be an integral part of the inclusion process (Avramidis et al., 2000).

Horne and Timmons (2007:13) propose that 'when the complexities of providing inclusive education for all students are fully understood, the more likely all students will be more effectively served.' In order to achieve this, school leaders, management and staff require the opportunity to gain a wider understanding of the rationale and educational practices involved which will enhance their own learning. This should be provided for by continuous professional development. Carrington and Robinson (2004:143) advise that 'training, access to information and support must all be sustained.' At present within the Irish context no time is allocated for in-service training in special and inclusive education for the mainstream class teacher within the school year.

The value of support groups for the professional development of a body of teachers with new responsibilities and skills is self-evident and an organised method of seeking advice or acquiring professional skills from colleagues is needed (The Teaching Council,

2017).Teachers often acknowledge their genuine fears with regards to meeting the educational needs of pupils with SEN in the mainstream classroom and especially in relation to children presenting with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Often having little experience in teaching such children, the teacher sometimes points to the inadequacy of his/her own teacher education to adequately prepare them for such a task (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002).

Ainscow et al. (2006) conclude that:

> inclusive developments-albeit of a highly ambiguous nature –are possible even in apparently unpromising circumstances and that there may be specific ways in which these developments can be supported (p.296).

Ainscow et al. (2006) concede that underpinning ideas about achievement in terms of inclusive values reframes our thinking and will help build a school system which is more genuinely inclusive. The formulation of a curriculum which is inclusive of all learners has therefore many implications for teaching and learning. Curriculum narrowing should be avoided at all costs. According to cognitive psychologists there is another step in between fluent decoding and comprehension in which readers call on background or prior knowledge about a subject to be aware of what the text is saying and what it is not saying. Readers who do not have sufficient background knowledge can understand some of the text, but they will not fully comprehend it. Evidence strongly suggests that narrowing the curriculum in early years schooling denies children a critical opportunity to develop extensive vocabulary and background knowledge necessary for robust reading comprehension later on (Craig, 2006). This narrowing of the curriculum results impacts negatively on students as they progress into upper primary school grades. Significant long-term educational costs will be imposed on students if subjects such as science, social studies and the arts are narrowed. This will make the work of secondary school

teachers more difficult and it will hamper thinking skills and reading comprehension skills in students.

2.16 Formulating an Inclusive Curriculum- Implications for Teaching and Learning

In 2007 the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) published the guidelines for teachers of students with general learning disabilities in order to assist teachers meet the needs of pupils with general learning disabilities within the context of the Irish classroom. The NCCA (2007) outlined that:

> drawing on the most recent research and current good practice in Ireland and abroad, the guidelines seek to support schools and teachers in developing curriculum experiences for students with general learning disabilities that are broad, balanced, relevant, differentiated, progressive and continuous (p.3).

These guidelines are a necessity towards the formulation of a curriculum that enables all learners within the classroom to achieve their full potential. In my experience as a teacher of infant classes I agree with Booth et al (2006:1) who suggests that 'inclusion is concerned with increasing the participation of all children as well as all the adults involved in a setting.'

King (2006:8) counsels that 'the ultimate goal for every teacher is to develop, refine and maintain strategies that address pupils' diverse learning needs and capabilities.' This process known as differentiation of the curriculum has been identified as an important feature of enabling pupils with SEN to access a broad and balanced curriculum within the inclusive setting. This involves adapting teaching and learning materials and methods in order to take cognisance of individual differences in learning styles and learning ability. Carey (2005:116) advocates that 'differentiation is more than just doing things differently; it is a philosophy of teaching that must filter down to the heart and soul of every classroom teacher. It is what good teaching, appropriate teaching is all about.' Westwood (2003) proposes from his research that curriculum content should be

presented in smaller units with activities and tasks designed to meet the individual capabilities of the pupils. Selecting or creating texts, planning for pupils to produce different outputs from a lesson (Buzan, 2003) and setting up the classroom to support groupwork and individualised learning all contribute to establishing more inclusive classroom practices. The implementation of more appropriate teaching strategies, the pace at which lesson content is delivered and the use of more varied ways of testing and assessment are all conducive to differentiated learning as well as the time of day when interventions take place (Callinan and van der Zee, 2010).

However, reflecting on my own practice, I have found that in order to implement such a programme, the expertise of the class teacher alone may be insufficient and extra teaching personnel or teaching assistants may need to be employed as well as the provision of resources such as specific teaching programmes. I have found that it is also necessary when appropriate, to engage in multi-professional collaboration and of course engage parental involvement when planning for the needs of the child. For true inclusion to be successful we need systemic change to occur, along with appropriate delegation of roles and responsibilities (Glazzard, 2011). In light of this, adequate coordination of all aspects of SEN provision must be provided if the noble aspiration of inclusion is to become a reality and the successful leading and managing of people for inclusive education will have a better impact on translating policy into practice within the classroom.

2.17 Leading and Managing People for Inclusive Education

Mackenzie (2007) outlined the following four main areas within which coordination was necessary if special needs provision was to be appropriate: ‘strategic direction and development of special educational needs provision in the school; teaching and learning;

leading and managing staff; and efficient and effective deployment of staff and resources' (p.212). In order that schools might develop practices and structures which will enable them to respond to pupils with SEN within the Irish context, the role of the special educational needs coordinator (SENO) cannot be underestimated. Cognisance must be taken of the fact that the coordination of special educational needs is a development issue for the whole school staff and not the sole role of the SENO. Central to the debate surrounding the effectiveness of the role of the SENO is the issue that they must be enabled to work at a whole school level. This is not possible within the Irish context as their role in relation to SEN provision does not exceed beyond the allocation of resources and therefore does not include classroom practice. Within the Irish context this role carries the title "special educational needs organiser" (SENO) and can be described as an administrative role only. In relation to possible future developments in of the role of the SENO within the Irish context, a future priority would be that they would be enabled to work at school level to assist with appropriate curricular planning for inclusion. Crowther et al. (2001) report that many Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENOs) experience difficulty in taking a more proactive role in the process of curriculum and school development.

Based on research findings, Szwed (2007) advises that the evolution of the role of the SENO

> has extended both the scope of the role and the possibilities open to SENCOs to be able to influence the practice and organisation of the school as a whole in the interests of pupils with special educational need (p.100).

However, Szwed also states that the following factors affect the fulfilling of this role:

- *lack of time*
- *liaison with staff*
- *liaison with external agencies*

- *bureaucracy*
- *the changing role of SENCOs* (p.100).

Teaching principals working to implement an appropriate policy for inclusion must be aware of the discourse of educational professionalism outlined by Sachs (2003) and in this light analyse their role in the following terms. As a technician, teacher's endeavour to implement prescribed practice and policy change. As a managerial professional teaching principals must aspire to develop professional self-efficacy within their area of prescribed practice and as an active collegiate professional endeavour to transform educational practice through critically engaged reflection and collaboration with staff and also with students. Fielding (2006) considers:

> the more profound, more wide-ranging possibilities of teachers learning with and from young people in more holistic ways through processes of co-constructed, collaborative work' and also extends pedagogical boundaries by proposing that in some contexts 'students might also teach their teachers (p. 311).

Within the scope of practice the discourse of educational professionalism acknowledges that all forms of knowledge encompass functional, cultural and critical aspects. In relation to inclusive provision, it is necessary for principals to integrate all three so that they are able to problematise and give voice to the underpinning values, assumptions and implications of educational arrangements, practices and policies within their schools. The implications for the ways in which people are managed and led within school environments gives rise to creating inclusive cultures in schools and it is in the spirit of collaboration, collegiality and community that this best takes place as described by Fielding (2007). Embracing the concept of our schools as a person-centred learning community, with a respect for difference emphasising an inclusive imperative that challenges role boundaries and invites engagement helps us to continuously move

towards a more inclusive setting. However, among all the difficulties which we face, perhaps under funding is the most pertinent of all.

2.18 Financing Inclusion

At the 2008 Irish Learning Support Association's Annual Conference the keynote address entitled 'Teaching and Learning: The Challenge of Inclusion' was delivered by Professor Tom Collins of Maynooth University, Ireland. He emphasised that the real challenge of inclusion is to ensure that a far greater level of available resources goes to first and second level schools, otherwise the knowledge society is always playing "catch-up". One of the barriers cited to including children with disabilities in mainstream schools is the lack of adequate resources and funding. The belief that special schools are better resourced to provide for the needs of children with SEN ensures their continued existence. In 1998 within the UK context, the Labour Government increased resources for inclusion. Within the Irish context in 1993 the SERC Report recommended that funding be increased for schools to cater for children who have special educational needs. Thomas and Loxley (2007) contend that:

> the future contribution of the inclusive educator pivots around the ability to retreat from histories of diagnosis and help to begin looking at ways in which schools enable community and encourage students' beliefs in themselves as members of such community- belief in themselves as learners (p.156).

While we as teachers within our own school context aspire to this ideal, the current lack of funding still stands in our way to its full implementation. However, it is important to acknowledge the States response of an annually increasing budget spend for the intervening years from 1998 to finance resource teachers, special needs assistants and special needs organisers, continuing professional development and resources (e.g., transport, laptops, soundfield systems, individual planning guidelines, etc.,) to support the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools

culminating with the introduction of a more equitable distribution of support allocation (DES, 2017).

2.19 Conclusion

While acknowledging that there are diverse and contrasting theoretical understandings of the reading process, interestingly policy acknowledges the importance of comprehension strategy teaching (DfES, 2006). Within the Irish context, the Primary School Curriculum (1999) envisages that the approach to the teaching of reading should be grounded in the general language experience of the child. Building on this base of general language competence, phonological and phonemic awareness should be fostered and the child should be encouraged to use a wide range of word identification strategies in order to be enabled to extract meaning from the text (Newell, 1996). The curriculum in Ireland advocates the fostering and development of higher comprehension skills in order to equip the learner reader with skills to extract meaning from the text. The curriculum further suggests that 'children will need a consistent and structured experience of questioning, discussing and probing the text in order to arrive at its full meaning'(p.61).This entails much more than mere recognition of words if the ultimate objective of reading comprehension is to be attained.

Within the USA context, research on text comprehension instruction conducted by the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) (2003) asserts that comprehension instruction strategies are conscious plans or a series of steps that good readers use to make sense of the text they are reading. Despite the best efforts of teachers many children with SEN continue to encounter challenges in learning to read. Some of the scrutiny that the reading process has undergone is a reflection of the consistent failure that some children experience in learning how to read and in comprehending the meaning of what they are reading.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The focus of my study was to explore teaching reading comprehension for the development of literacy skills in children with SEN in mainstream schools from the perspectives of pedagogy, practices and perceptions. In the first part of this chapter I will provide a rationale for the methodology which I have chosen to conduct this study. I will outline my epistemological and ontological perspectives underpinning locating this research within the interpretive paradigm and provide an overview of my analytical Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology. I will outline my research design, research questions, sampling, methods of data collection and data analysis strategy. I will identify the themes present in the data and the phases and steps taken in the analytical process. I will delineate my ethical considerations and provide a description of my reflective portfolio.

Edwards (2002:160) concludes that educational research provides' 'insights into motivations and actions in policy and pedagogy.' When I consider my research, it is therefore important to be cognisant of what pertains to educational practice. Pring (2004:141) advises that 'research is the servant of professional judgement not its master.' Pring (2004:11) also outlines that 'it is important, therefore, in researching anything, to attend to the 'logic of discourse' of that which is researched into - in this case, 'education'. In light of this, my research may be described as the activity of building up a coherent system of knowledge about the world, particularly about parts of it relating to teaching and learning in the area of reading comprehension.

Anderson (1998:6) contends that 'Research in education is a disciplined attempt to address or solve problems through the collection and analysis of primary data for the purpose of description, explanation, generalisation and prediction'. I am inspired by this definition of the purpose of educational research and this informs my methodology. It is my hope that my research will contribute to evidence based practice, as evidence based practice informs the interpretation and implementation of specific policy in relation to educational practice. Evidence-based research plays this role in the context of my study.

3.2 Epistemological and Ontological Perspectives

I will firstly address the concepts of 'epistemology' and 'ontology' in discussing how I arrived at my choice of research instrument. Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that concerns itself with the nature of knowledge. Bryman (2004:13) advises that 'an epistemological issue concerns the question of what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline'. An epistemological question such as 'what are the grounds on which we claim to 'know' something?' must be addressed within the paradigm debate. Epistemology is based upon what we see and what we understand whereas ontology concerns itself with reality or the nature of existence (Coleman and Briggs, 2002). Epistemology is the study of how we know things. Ontology is the study of what we know, the study of being, of reality and what exists.

My epistemological stance is subjective in that I understand that knowledge can be constructed by individuals and their perceptions of what knowledge is. My position is justified as I wanted to explore the teaching of reading comprehension from the perspective of how the people I interviewed constructed their own realities. I explored teacher's explanations of the strategies that they adopt where children present with SEN

and I explored their evaluation of how effective they thought those strategies were. By exploring how parents and teachers perceive the experience of working with the children with SEN in the current system, I hoped to build a picture of the system of provision as it currently exists and to interpret its strengths and challenges through the lens of the literature.

Schön (1983) proposed that 'the modern professional constantly questioned and reflected upon practice'. The Educational Sociologist Lawrence Stenhouse proposed that 'teachers needed to be at the centre of curriculum development if it was to be effective' (Stenhouse, 1975, cited in Burton and Bartlett 2005:35). In this way the particular kind of professionalism of research-based teaching is implied. Pollard (2006:19) suggests that 'reflective teaching is based on teacher judgment, informed by evidence-based enquiry and insights from other research.' These concepts of professionalism and reflective practice are relevant to my study in the area of reading comprehension, because I, as a teacher, can assume the role of a reflective practitioner intent on enhancing the learning opportunities of the pupils I support.

A new vision of teaching as a 'profession' has begun to emerge due to the considerable expansion of the knowledge base of teaching (Burke, 2002). From this perspective, I am now able to understand how the system as it exists is shaped by people's experiences and knowledge and how these inform the practice of teaching reading comprehension strategies to primary school children with reading difficulties.

3.3 Interpretive Paradigm

A paradigm (in social science) consists of a set of assumptions about the social world with a set of distinctive concepts about the nature of existence (ontology) and how we know things (epistemology) which informs a researcher's questions and methodology.

Paradigms are perspectives that inform the way educational provision is planned and delivered (Silverman, 2000) and they inform both the planning and delivery of educational provision and the design of research into its effectiveness. Conducting research leads to evidence-based practice.

Bassey (1990:41) contends that paradigms provide 'a network of coherent ideas about the nature of the world and of the functions of researchers which, adhered to by a group of researchers conditions the patterns of their thinking and underpins their research actions'. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994:3) qualitative research 'is a multi-method focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. Bryman (2004:15) concludes that 'interpretivism is a term given to a contrasting epistemology to positivism'. I understand the concept a paradigm as being the frame within which I can hang the pictures of different sets of values and beliefs – the views which are painted by either the interpretivists or the positivists giving us a glimpse of the lens through which they see the world. Positivists apply a set of philosophical approaches that seeks to apply scientific principles and methods to social phenomena in order to explain them (Kitchin, 2006). Interpretivists emphasise the ability of the individual to construct meaning (Ernest, 1994). Ernest describes the concept of phenomenology that I embraced in my research as the "need to consider human beings' subjective interpretations, their perceptions of the world (their life-worlds) as our starting point in understanding social phenomena" (p.25).

There are two main approaches to research, namely, inductive and deductive (Gray, 2004). Inductive research sets out to generate theory from research, which is the aim of my study. It is theory 'building' in that data is collected, processed and analysed from which theory is developed. The deductive approach is theory 'testing' in that a theory is presented and then tested following the collection, processing and analysing of the data

(Stevenson, 2009). My research took an inductive approach because it is theory building and embraces the logic of discovery and involves building a theory from evidence. As I have examined a number of theoretical models of reading that I have previously referenced, it was necessary for me to examine what processes were being applied that is conducive to a bottom-up approach within settings because of the assumption made that if a particular model of reading includes a number of strategies, teachers usually just implement those strategies. Teachers do not just adhere to just one theory of reading and they do not necessarily think at a theoretical level when they are teaching children to read in the class (DES, 2019). Teachers tend to mix and match and use strategies from many theories, therefore I endeavoured to explore and unpack which strategies teachers are using and extrapolate which elements of which theory they are applying in the classroom. Therefore, teachers are not just using approaches from one theory. They are using a range of approaches and combining them together. Their practice is based on experience of what has been previously successful practice rather than theory driven. I want to use the evidence that I am going to collect from the teachers to ascertain whether or not they are applying one theoretical model of reading or implementing elements and approaches from all of the theoretical models. As a result, I am going to analyse the data deductively and test what they are actually doing in the classroom. Therefore, data collected was processed and analysed and from this a theory was developed (Gray, 2004). Interpretivists tend to use a case study approach from which to generate theory (Cohen et al., 2007). Developing findings from the data collected (inductive) starts from a theoretical grounding (deduction) as is the case in my research. My intention is to build rather than test theory in an area of work that is relatively under-researched and not well theorised. Whilst there is a lot of discussion at a theoretical level about how the development of reading occurs, there is less research conducted with teachers in the classroom regarding what specific strategies they use and that is the rationale for my

intention to test teacher's applications of those theoretical models. This element is under researched and not fully explored at present.

The school or the classroom or the home or the home-school relationship is complex. It is something that cannot be understood without appreciating people's understandings of these concepts or people's relationships to them, therefore my research is a qualitative interpretivist study (Anderson and Arsenault, 1998; Robson, 2002). Anderson (1998:119) proposes that 'qualitative research is a form of inquiry that explores phenomena in their natural settings and uses multi-methods to interpret, understand, explain and bring meaning to them'. It aims to provide an in-depth, holistic description of phenomena and tries to capture the richness and complexity of behaviours that occur in natural settings. Using interpretive methods enabled me to find out whether there are certain ways that children presenting with SEN can be enabled to read better by being supported to comprehend the material that they are reading. This is a complex reality; there are many explanations for it, many ways by which people interpret it and many ways by which it translates to practice.

Given the complex nature of the teaching of reading comprehension within the inclusive context, qualitative approaches enabled the search for a deeper professional understanding. Research embracing the interpretivist paradigm sought to enable systemic change within education, bringing with it the realisation that it is the system of education that needs to change in order to include the child with a disability and not the other way about (King, 2006). My methodology achieved this by gaining the perceptions, practices and pedagogies of the participants involved. Within the context of my research, the qualitative approach gave a deeper understanding of social processes and their implications combined with perceptions and understandings. It allowed for complexity of human behaviour and its full descriptions facilitate transparency (Denscombe, 2003).

Anderson (1998) suggests that a limitation of qualitative research is that different observers may not get the same results as there is more than one valid view of any social situation. However, qualitative research is not only or always about observation. A limitation of qualitative research may also lie in the inability of its findings to be generalised to other communities. It was also time consuming and demanding. Hammersley (2000:400) indicates that 'qualitative research can also be of value through inventing ways of talking about the tacit knowledge that is involved in a complex and difficult activity like teaching, and by showing that what we *think* is happening is not always what is *actually* happening (or is not all that is happening)' (Emphasis in text). At the level of educational policy development, innovation may often have unintended consequences and problems may not be easily solved. However, the implications for my research is that best practice is identified and that gaps in provision were discovered and addressed.

Anderson (1998) asserts that research in education attempts to address or solve problems through the collection and analysis of primary data for the purpose of describing, explaining, generalising and predicting. The paradigm informs the qualitative methodology and this qualitative methodology informs the methods of data collection, that is, the tools that I used, for example, interviews. My epistemological perspectives influenced my actual research questions and methods of research that will be discussed in the following section.

3.4 Overview of Analytical Approach

Qualitative research in my context was a holistic approach which took account of contexts within which human experiences occurred in the schools and was thus concerned with learning from particular instances or cases. I sought to access the inner

world of perception and meaning-making in order to understand, describe, and explain social process from the perspective of my study participants. As Maykut and Morehouse (1994) point out: ‘words are the way that most people come to understand their situations; we create our world with words; we explain ourselves with words; we defend and hide ourselves with words’. Thus, my qualitative data analysis and presentation: ‘the task of the researcher is to find patterns within those words and to present those patterns for others to inspect while at the same time staying as close to the construction of the world as the participants originally experienced it’ (p18). This approach did not commence with a prior hypothesis to be tested and proved but with a focus-of-inquiry that took me on a voyage of discovery as it took an inductive approach to data analysis, and my research outcomes are not broad generalisations but contextual findings; that I as a qualitative researcher speak of as ‘transferability’ (from context to context) rather than generalisability (Booth et al., 2008).

While qualitative research in my study is not given to mathematical abstractions, mine is nonetheless systematic in its approach to data collection and analysis. Firstly framed by a focus of inquiry, where data was collected through interviews, open-ended questioning allowed my study participants to articulate their perceptions and experiences freely and spontaneously regarding the topic of reading comprehension. In analysing data generated in this format, responses were not grouped according to pre-defined categories, rather salient categories of meaning and relationships between categories were derived from the data itself through a process of inductive reasoning that I used known as coding (Saldaña, 2016).

The rationale for using IPA in this study was that an IPA approach offered me the means whereby by I accessed and analysed these articulated perspectives so that they were integrated in a model that sought to explain the social processes under study in my area. IPA has an idiographic focus, which means that it aims to offer insights into how a given person, in a given context, makes sense of a given phenomenon. Aligned with a phenomenological epistemology (Smith et al., 1999; Smith and Osborn, 2003), it concerns itself with understanding people's everyday experience of reality, in great detail, so as to gain an understanding of the phenomenon in question. In terms of analysis, IPA provided detailed examinations of the personal lived experiences of my participants within the context of their particular roles that provided me with insights into how they made sense of the phenomenon of reading comprehension teaching. The meanings that the particular experiences held for my participants enabled me to explore their personal experiences and personal perceptions.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Maykut and Morehouse (1994) suggest that the axioms or assumptions about the social world underpinning the positivist paradigm differ greatly from the assumptions about social reality underpinning the phenomenological paradigm, and it is these differing sets of assumptions that shape the way researchers approach social inquiry – with those adopting a positivist position tending toward quantitative methodology and those adopting a phenomenological position tending toward qualitative methodology. These differing sets of assumptions encompass five key axiomatic stances concerning: the nature of reality (ontology); the relationship of knower to known (epistemology); the possibility of generalisation; the possibility of causal linkages; and the role of values in inquiry (axiology). These five key points of difference between the positivist and phenomenological paradigms concerning these axiomatic stances may be outlined in the following table:

Table 3.1: Key points of difference between the Positivist and Phenomenological paradigms concerning axiomatic stances

Axioms About	Positivist Paradigm	Phenomenological Paradigm
1. The nature of reality	Reality is single, tangible and fragmentable into independent variables and processes, any of which can be studied independently of the others; inquiry can converge onto that reality until, finally, it can be predicted and controlled.	There are multiple realities. These realities are socio-psychological constructions forming an inter-connected whole. These realities can only be studied holistically. Given the multi-dimensionality of these realities, prediction and control are unlikely outcomes of inquiry, although some level of understanding (verstehen) can be achieved.
2. The relationship of knower to known	The knower can stand outside what is to be known. True objectivity is possible.	The inquirer and the 'object' of inquiry interact to influence one another; knower and known are inseparable.
3. The possibility of generalisation	Time- and context-free generalisations are possible (nomothetic statements).	Only time- and context-bound working hypotheses are possible (idiographic statements).
4. The possibility of causal linkages	One event comes before another event and can be said to cause that event.	Events shape each other. Multi-directional relationships can be discovered.
5. The role of values	Inquiry is value-free.	Inquiry is value-bound; values mediate and shape approaches to, and engagement in, the research process.

As the purpose of this study was to explore perceptions, quantitative approaches investigating how reading is being taught would have been at philosophical odds with what I wanted to achieve. My study is qualitative in nature because I am looking at the

participants perceptions of what is effective, I am not measuring what is effective. Employing IPA offered me the opportunity to analyse my participants voices (meaning-making) and not just an analysis of emerging themes. IPA was chosen because it gives one the view of the world through someone else's lens. Phenomenology is concerned with looking at the world through the perspective of somebody else, it concerns itself with examining their experiences and their world view.

This approach involved my breaking down the data into discrete segments or 'units of meaning' (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994) and I coded them to categories. Categories arising from this method generally took two forms: those that were derived from the participants' customs and language, and those that I identified as significant to my project's focus-of-inquiry the goal of the former 'is to reconstruct the categories used by subjects to conceptualise their own experiences and world view', the goal of the latter is to assist the researcher in developing theoretical insights through developing themes that illuminate the social processes operative in the site under this study; thus, the analytical process stimulates thinking that leads to both descriptive and explanatory categories (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:334-341).

3.5 Research Design

My study is an interpretivist, interview-based study of principals, teachers and parents which aimed to produce data about perceptions, practices and pedagogy relating to the teaching of reading comprehension for children with reading difficulties who are included in mainstream schools in Ireland. This is supported by data from children's school self evaluation data and also school level data such as policy and curricular documents relating to the organisation, policy, practices, and pedagogy in relation to the teaching of reading comprehension for children presenting with SEN. This section

contains how the data collected aimed to answer the research questions and explains how I structured my study in relation to the philosophical principles discussed therein as well as providing a rationale for each of my questions. I was aiming to elicit information from the teachers regarding how they taught children with SEN more so than the amount of children they taught. To this end, my objective was to discover *how* they would teach children with SEN and not *how many* children with SEN they taught, therefore the documents presented in the following table were analysed.

Table 3.2: School Documents analysed using Content Analysis

SCHOOL DOCUMENTS ANALYSED USING CONTENT ANALYSIS
• Parent and pupil questionnaires • Results of pupil focus groups • School self-evaluation reports • School Improvement Plans • Teacher's checklists • Responses from parents' surveys • Standardised assessment results • School-level data (school policies, curricular plans, teachers' plans, methods of assessment)

In the context of my study, content analysis was used as a categorising approach to determine trends and patterns of words used and the structures and discourses of participants communication with the purpose being to describe the characteristics of the document's content by examining who says what, to whom, and with what effect in relation to the teaching of reading comprehension (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Content analysis is of particular importance for the study of communication because all human verbal and mediated exchanges involve messages (content) as was the case in my study (Lacy et al., 2015). Qualitative content analysis was used for analysing the qualitative

data. The trustworthiness of data collection can be verified by providing precise details of the method used for sampling and also by the participants' descriptions (Elo et al., 2014). An advantage of the use of content analysis is that large volumes of textual data and different textual sources could be dealt with and used to substantiate evidence from my participants (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008).

3.6 Research Questions

The overall aim and purpose of my research was addressed through posing the following overarching research question: how is the teaching of reading comprehension for the development of literacy skills in children with special educational needs (SEN) conducted in mainstream schools; pedagogically, practically and perceptually? The following subsidiary questions identified the issues that were explored within each area:

- *What is the current practice in the teaching of reading comprehension in literacy skills for children with SEN included in mainstream schools?*
- *What pedagogical intervention strategies are classified as best practice by schools?*
- *Which strategies work best for children with SEN in the classroom?*

Good teaching strategies help children develop reading comprehension skills in the context of SEN education because they give them the tools and the knowledge to acquire meaning from the written word (Kirby et al., 2008). Pressley (2000) proposes that if children were taught comprehension skills and appropriate strategies to enable them to comprehend, then children's comprehension and reading skills would greatly improve. I examined what strategies teachers are using and related this to the literature. Therefore my exploratory question about teaching strategies is based on this well grounded understanding. My exploratory question aimed to ascertain if this is so in my particular area. Within this the issue of holism was explored. The issue of how school principals

address the needs of children with SEN within this and also how the school principals feel they support implementation of the strategy or strategies (including supporting pupils, teachers and parents) were examined.

Pressley (2000:557) asserts that a reasonable hypothesis to propose is that if elementary reading instruction were to be transformed so that children were taught the skills and knowledge that he advocates, children's comprehension and reading skills would be better. In light of this assertion the issue of where the school places its focus (teaching, assessment, testing and outcomes) was addressed, as well as finding out how effectiveness of strategy implementation and the strategy itself is monitored and evaluated. Considering how far school principals perceive the strategy encourages successful reading in pupils presenting with SEN was also explored. Eilers and Pinkley (2006) highlight that whilst a lot a testing of comprehension occurs, instruction in comprehension pedagogy (teaching) is lacking. In this area I ascertained how mainstream primary school principals and teachers identified strategies that foster and develop reading comprehension skills within the inclusive school setting. I investigated how they implement strategies and what resources and/or special support is drawn upon. Asking how teachers experience the implementation of reading comprehension strategies was also pertinent. Within my research, I focussed on asking what the role of teacher preparation is in the development of reading comprehension skills for pupils with SEN as well as ascertaining teacher's views about their role in implementing reading comprehension strategies to support inclusion. I hereby sought to define 'best practice' as a result of doing the research and I considered their collective voices in this context.

The issue of how school principals address the needs of children with SEN within this and also how the school principals felt they supported implementation of the strategy or strategies (including supporting pupils, teachers and parents) were examined.

- *How do teachers currently assess reading comprehension?*
- *How does this assessment of reading comprehension inform their teaching?*

Paris and Hamilton (2009) imply that the concepts of assessing and improving reading comprehension pose enormous problems. These questions explored how teachers translated the strategies in the classroom (including the skills taught and how this is achieved in content areas). The evidence identified how they are supported to do so, how they use the strategies to support individual learners, how they are prepared and where they place emphasis (assessment, testing and teaching). I learned best about such strategies not by measuring them, but by talking to teachers about how they undertake their work and by discussing how they implement school policy in the area of reading comprehension.

- *What strategies support the development of reading comprehension skills within the context of home based literacy?*

In order to address this question the extent to which parents felt enabled to assist their children with the development of reading comprehension was examined. In her comprehensive account of the development of English as a school subject, Poulson (1998) states ‘Children’s initial induction into literacy in the early years is largely the job of the primary school, in partnership with home and the wider community’ (p.10). A further ontological assumption I have, is that I believe that parents need to be enabled to help their children in this area too. This was explored by examining not only teachers’ but parents’ current strategies for fostering reading comprehension skills in order to understand which strategies work best and identify what is lacking. King (2006) justifies

this assumption by contending that strategy provision is a major factor in comprehension and inclusion, and that these strategies can be identified and managed. I learned best about such strategies not by measuring them, but by talking to teachers about how they undertook their work and by talking to parents regarding their perception of these strategies and on how this impacts upon them.

In order to address this question the extent to which parents feel enabled to assist their children with the development of reading comprehension was examined. These issues were researched by involving parents and teachers in the process. Using the theories underpinning the models of reading provided an analytical framework that I used to interpret my participants experiences, perceptions and voices as outlined in the following table.

Table 3.3: Overview of Research Design

Data sources	**Purpose of data**	**Data analysis**
Interviews with principals	School policy, planning and organisation	*IPA Analysis of Data:* IPA concerns itself with understanding people's everyday experience of reality, in great detail, so as to gain an understanding of the phenomenon in question (Smith et al., 1999, Smith and Osborn, 2003).
Interviews with teachers	Teachers' interpretation of policy Teachers' perspectives Translation to classroom practice Application of policy	
Interviews with parents	Parents' interpretation of policy Parents' perspectives	
Documentary analysis of school-level data: • School policies • Curricular plans • Teachers' plans • Methods of assessment) • Teacher's checklists • Standardised assessment results	Identify current practice and best practice Identify strategies	*Content Analysis of Data:* Content Analysis of Data was used as a categorising approach to determine trends and patterns of words used and the structures and discourses of participants communication with the purpose being to describe the characteristics of the document's content by examining who says what, to whom, and with what effect in relation to the teaching of reading comprehension (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).
School Self Evaluation data: • School Improvement Plans • Parent and pupil questionnaires • Responses from parents' surveys • Results of pupil focus groups • School self-evaluation reports • School Improvement Plans	Ascertain how pupils are currently performing Establish current assessment practices and techniques Discover parental and pupils perceptions Determine the focus of school improvement plans	

3.7 Sampling

Defining life in terms of inner experience embraces the notions of moral responsibility, individuality and notions of choice and freedom (Cohen et al., 2007). It succeeds in reflecting our unique ability to interpret our experiences and represent them to ourselves. Therefore an important element in this study was to interpret and represent the experiences of both parents and teachers. Miles and Huberman (1994:27) assert that 'qualitative researchers usually work with *small* samples of people, nested in their context and studied in depth'. I chose this group as it represents a diverse variety of school contexts and therefore my sample was legitimate and adequate to justify my findings (Cohen et al., 2007). It is for this reason that I conducted interviews in five mainstream primary schools ranging from smaller two teacher rural schools to larger schools located in towns. Some had access to a full-time SET or learning support teacher while some had only part-time access to this service. There was a mixture of schools with multi-class as well a single stream contexts. In each of the five schools I conducted interviews with a principal teacher, a mainstream class teacher, a learning support teacher/special education teacher and a parent. Difficulties in reading attainment was the identified special educational need of the children whose parents consented to participate. As one school principal was on leave at the time that I conducted my study I therefore interviewed the acting principal of that school. The teachers and principals all had pupils with SEN currently enrolled in their classes who have specifically identified learning difficulties with reading. I did not include Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) in the study as in the Irish context the role of the SNA is a non teaching role therefore they could not give me information on pedagogy. I did not include researchers as their role is also a non- teaching role. All principals and learning support teachers were working in primary schools within the west of Ireland, where teaching occurs through the medium of the English language. Some principals also had full time teaching duties. Geographical

locations were widespread throughout the west of Ireland. I did not include schools from my own geographical area as I would have personally known all the potential interviewees and I did not want to influence the results of the study. The criteria for selecting the sample of parents was that they would all have a child presenting with a reading difficulty.

Table 3.4: School Sample Information

SCHOOL NAME	TYPE OF SCHOOL	SIZE OF SCHOOL	PARTICIPANTS INTERVIEWED FROM SCHOOL	SEN PUPIL PROFILE	READING SUPPORT PROGRAMMES
School A	Urban Multi-class Mixed Teaching Principal	Three class teachers and one learning support/SET shared with other schools	Principal 1 class teacher 1 SET/Learning Support Teacher 1 parent	Male	Shared Reading Programme
School B	Rural Multi-class Mixed Teaching principal	Two class teachers and one learning support/SET shared with other schools	Principal 1 class teacher 1 SET/Learning Support Teacher 1 parent	Female	Literacy Lift-Off
School C	Rural Multi-class Mixed Teaching Principal	Four class teachers and one learning support/SET shared with other schools	Principal 1 class teacher 1 SET/Learning Support Teacher 1 parent	Female	After-school homework club Literacy Lift-Off Building Bridges of Understanding (Reading Comprehension Programme)
School D	Urban Single stream Mixed Administrative Principal	Twelve class teachers and three learning support/SET	Acting Principal 1 class teacher 1 SET/Learning Support Teacher 1 parent Privately paid tutor	Male	Building Bridges of Understanding (Reading Comprehension Programme) Phonological Awareness Training Programme (PAT).
School E	Rural Multi-class Mixed Teaching principal	Four teachers and one learning support/SET	Principal 1 class teacher 1 SET/Learning Support Teacher 1 parent	Male	Reading Comprehension Strategy Programme Peer-tutoring for Reading Fluency Programme

3.8 Methods of Data Collection

According to Wengraf (2001), research interviewing involves collecting information with the purpose of developing or constructing a 'model' of some aspect of reality which it is hoped will be found to be in accordance with 'the facts' about that reality or testing a constructed model to see whether it confirmed or falsified 'the facts'. Hence, I decided to work across five schools and interview a principal, a SET/learning support teacher, a classroom teacher and a parent from each of those five schools. In recruiting the schools, my first point of contact was with the principal of each of the five schools whereby I informed them about the purpose of the study and gain access, consent and permission to conduct semi-structured interviews with all of the other participants in each of the schools. The duration of the interviews was between one hour and one hour and thirty minutes in length. Interviews were conducted at the end of the school year in locations requested by the interviewee. Although the experience of conducting three pilot interviews was positive from the perspective of gaining experience in the area of interviewing skills, it, however, did not influence final data generation as the data gleaned from the pilot interviews was collected solely for piloting purposes and it was not included in the data analysis process in conducting the research project. In this instance, as part of data collection, the semi-structured interviews sought information ascertaining what teachers' views were about their role in implementing reading comprehension strategies to support inclusion. Interviews were also used as a means of seeking information on parents' perceptions about reading comprehension and on the 'home literacy' element of the research. I chose semi-structured interviews as opposed to choosing a focus group in order that each parent and teacher would be afforded the opportunity of privacy in a one to one-to-one setting. I felt that some people could be intimidated by being part of a group and therefore they could be reluctant to offer their

opinions in such a setting (Yin, 2009). Assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were given to the interviewees. The interviews were digitally recorded in order to accurately record the information provided by the interviewees and to allow for transcription. The use of interviewing embraces the concept of phenomenology. Bryman (2004:15) describes phenomenology as 'a philosophy that is concerned with the question of how individuals make sense of the world around them'. This is relevant to my study because it relies on parents and teachers engaging in retrospective reflection such as thinking about past experiences and what they mean to them.

The aforementioned Literacy and Numeracy for learning and life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011–2020 (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) requires that schools evaluate their literacy and numeracy provision. This involves evaluating literacy provision from the perspectives of the teachers, parents and children. I included data obtained by this means from the children regarding their perceptions on how they experience the organisation of the teaching of reading comprehension from the perspective of the learner. In order to ascertain whether or not the reading comprehension strategies were enabling pupils to comprehend reading effectively it was necessary to include data about the children themselves. This gave me an insight into the children's own perceptions of how they perform in school. As a result, the decision was made not to interview children as part of the study, however, children's opinions were accessed by the SSE documentation that provided me an oversight of the children's perceptions.

The children on whom data was included were from across all grade levels and all age levels. This SSE data was collected from the children at the end of the school year prior

to the children progressing to a new class as the teachers aimed to assess whether or not the children had acquired their learning objectives in order to establish a base-line on which to formulate their teaching programme for the new academic year.

This information was used in order to triangulate the findings drawn from parents, children and teachers. This data was obtained by examining school self evaluation documents. I used this data quantitatively as it is for the purpose of the conveying of information. The inclusion of data such as teacher's school self-evaluation records in the area of reading also provided me with valuable data.

There are both strengths and limitations to using interviews as a means of data collection. The interdependence of interaction between interviewer and interviewee to produce knowledge is the ultimate aim of interviewing (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Through the professional conversation that occurred during the interviewing process, I learned about the experiences of my participants, their feelings, their attitudes and perceptions. In contrast, by their nature, qualitative interviewing is not a scientific data collection instrument, therefore qualitative research is not objective but subjective and is person dependent. The data is gleaned from posing leading questions therefore a criticism may be that the evidence is unreliable, however, conveying the implicit meaning of what is said during the interview and explicitly interpreting that meaning minimises the issue of unreliability (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

3.9 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Methodology

The methodology that I adopted in my study was based on the principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as described by Smith (2009), who

drew on the work of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty in developing the IPA framework. There is no one definitive method of my data analysis conducted through IPA, but, rather it adopts flexible strategies towards analytic development. The common processes in IPA move from the particular (idiographic) to the shared, and from the descriptive to the interpretative (hermeneutic). Key IPA principles are my commitment to understanding my participant's lived, conscious experience, and adopting a psychological focus on personal meaning-making in specific school contexts (the double hermeneutic).

I aimed to make sense of the participant who is trying to make sense of their own experiences using memory and language (Smith, 2011; Smith and Osborn, 2008). IPA is phenomenological in its project, where I endeavoured to understand and elucidate the human lived conscious experience of phenomena but psychological in its analysis of meaning-making and hermeneutic interpretation. The analytical strategy adopted in my study is informed by these principles and derived from Smith's (2008) practical guidelines for the process of data analysis and interpretation.

Contributions to the rigour of the methodology, measures for establishing trustworthiness and the challenges of researcher effect are detailed in this section and an illustration of how coding was applied to interview and documentary data is provided in the Appendices 1, 2 and 3. The cycles of coding (appendices 1 to 4) show the history of coding from codes to categories to themes and that the process was completed in the first place and completed in a manner consistent with IPA in the second. Therefore the codebook which is presented in four parts clearly shows the history of each stage of IPA and how it was completed. The process by which coding was applied and a rationale for

this, is explained in detail for each stage in section 3.12 “Phases and Steps Taken in the Analytical Process” below. Please see Appendix 6 detailing a flow chart and footnote illustrating the process of how codes were transferred to categories and to themes. This will explain the cycles of coding that I conducted which included code checking, and verification. Appendix 7 illustrates an example of the process of coding whereby text is dragged to codes based on meaning; this example shows a passage taken from an interview.

3.10 Data Analysis Strategy

Qualitative analysis commenced at the start of my project – it was then ongoing and integral to all stages of the project (Symon and Cassell, 1998), most specifically with ‘data gathering and analysis [being] dynamically linked’ (Cousin, 2009: 31). As I digitally recorded the data, the transcription of all the recordings into written form were also a key element of the process of analysis.

In the process of analysis, I endeavoured to determine how emerging patterns related to one another. I ensured that my approach was consistent with the research method that I employed and also with my research questions. In the querying of principals in relation to how they organised the teaching of reading comprehension and in the querying of teachers as to how they experienced this organisation within their classroom settings, I structured the interviews so that it was possible to analyse relationships between these different sets of interviews. This was achieved through coding. As well as being interested in teachers’ and parents’ perceptions, I was also interested in a wider range of phenomena which all play a role in how the teaching of reading comprehension is supported. The phenomena studied included teachers’ and parents’ knowledge of what reading comprehension means and what is involved in the teaching of reading comprehension, their interpretations of policy, the ways in which teachers in particular

apply policy in their own practice, how they translate policy into practice, and what they choose to emphasise or de-emphasise in this activity. I also 'asked' these questions of the documents that I consulted as part of documentary analysis. This approach enabled me to make analytical judgements about 'best practices' and 'strategies' that I made based on the data I produced.

Two examples of strategies for qualitative analysis that are described in the research literature are compiled by Kitwood (1977, cited in Cohen et al., 2000:295) and Miles and Huberman (1994:187). A range of analytical strategies based on the work of Kitwood (1977, cited in Cohen et al., 2000:295) suggests outlining the frequency with which particular ideas or themes are raised and highlighting additional concepts as a precursor to further more in-depth analysis. Identifying similarities and differences by identifying comparative exploration, for example between different variables within my sample or different cases (males/females, different schools, different roles) helped me with my data analysis by exploring similar themes or areas, reducing and restructuring the data to aid the process of understanding and identifying emerging themes and seeing connections between the data. I therefore approached its analysis thematically and by looking at discourse.

As analysis of the data collected through my interviews took place, I moved backwards and forwards through the stages of discovery, testing out, verifying and confirming. This can be described as data immersion, and was approached as a critical, reflective, and iterative process that cycles between data and an overarching research framework that keeps the big picture in mind (O'Leary, 2005).

Qualitative analysis is about searching for understanding, interpretations, meaning and value in data, rather than measuring facts and figures. Analysis occurred as the data is organised, structured, managed, re-organised and reduced into themes, categories, trends and patterns. Interpretation is attaching significance and meaning to the emergent analysis; this is where my explanations are built. Miles and Huberman (1994:10) propose that 'the strengths of qualitative data rest very centrally on the competence with which their analysis is carried out'. The analysis of data is thus 'inescapably a selective process' (Miles and Huberman 1994:55) with coding and classifying being the means by which selection and data reduction can be affected (Cohen et al., 2007).

3.11 Data Analysis

In using qualitative data analysis software NVivo 10, I did not capitulate the hermeneutic task to the logic of the computer; rather the computer was used as a tool for efficiency and not as a tool which in and of itself conducted analysis and drew conclusions. As Fielding and Lee (1998) explain, myself as qualitative researcher 'want tools which support analysis, but leave the analyst firmly in charge' (p.167). Importantly, such software also served as a tool for transparency. Arguably, the production of an audit trail was the key most important criteria on which the trustworthiness and plausibility of my study could be established. Qualitative analysis software's logging of data movements and coding patterns derived from coding of the interviews, and mapping of conceptual categories and thought progression, rendered all stages of the analytical process traceable and transparent, facilitating me to produce a more detailed and comprehensive audit trail than manual mapping of this complicated process could allow me.

3.12 Phases and Steps Taken in the Analytical Process

I conducted eight discrete cycles of analyses across the iterative process of data analysis. These cycles involved three separate cycles of coding, two cycles of managing codes, one for my initial categorisation of open codes and one for my data reduction through consolidating my codes into a more abstract theoretical framework (themes) and one which used writing itself as a tool to prompt deeper thinking of the data (Bazeley, 2009), leading to findings from which conclusions were drawn. These eight cycles were:

Phase 1: ***Reading and Initial Noting*** This involved my transcribing, reading and re-reading the interview data and noting down initial ideas. It further involved importing my transcripts and related notes and observations into a data management tool known as NVivo (QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 10, 2014).

Phase 2: ***Open Coding*** (see Appendix[1]) involved a broad participant-driven initial coding of the interview data so as to deconstruct the data from its original chronology into initial non-hierarchical general codes. These codes which contained 'units of meaning' were coded from the interview scripts, were assigned clear names and definitions that would serve as 'rules for inclusion' as the coding process progressed (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994:126–149).

Phase 3: ***Categorisation of Codes*** involved re-ordering my codes identified in phase 2 into categories of codes by grouping related codes under these categories and then organising them into a framework that made sense to further the analysis of the data set and addressed the research questions. I also distilled, re-named and merged categories to ensure that names and definitions accurately reflected the coded content. Categories were described as a halfway-house between organising initial codes into logical groups and generating themes (see Appendix[2]).

Phase 4: ***Coding On*** This involved my further breaking down the now restructured categories into subordinate categories so that I could offer more in-depth understanding of the highly qualitative aspects under scrutiny and so that I could consider divergent views, negative cases, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours coded to these categories so as to glean clearer insights into the meanings embedded in them.

Phase 5: ***Data Reduction*** This involved my consolidating codes from preceding cycles into more abstract, philosophical and literature-based superordinate themes that I named practices, perceptions and pedagogy, so that I could thereby create a final framework to form the basis of the write-up (see Appendix[3]). These final themes were placed in a matrix comparing each school to facilitate both 'in-case' and 'cross-case' analysis. Reading the matrix down revealed the extent to which themes and sub-themes impacted on any individual school while reading across the matrix allowed for comparing the extent to which themes were shared across schools participating in my research. An example of an application of this analytical tool is shown in Appendix[4] .

Phase 6: Involved my ***writing analytical memos*** against the higher level themes to accurately summarise the content of each category and its codes and propose empirical findings against such categories. These memos considered 5 key areas:

1. The content of the cluster of codes on which it is reporting (what was said by my participants)
2. The coding patterns where relevant (levels of coding for example although this could be used to identify exceptional cases as well as shared experiences).
3. Considering background information recorded against participants and considering any patterns that may exist in relation to participants' profiles (who said it)

4. Situating the code(s) in the storyboard–meaning considering the relatedness of themes to each other, and their importance in terms of the research questions, and sequencing disparate codes and clusters of codes into a story or narrative which is structured and can be expressed in the form of a coherent and cohesive findings and discussion chapter
5. Considering primary sources in the context of relationships with the literature as well as identifying gaps in the literature

Phase 7: Validation involved my testing, validating and revising analytical memos so as to self- audit my proposed findings by seeking evidence in the data beyond textual quotes to support the stated findings and seeking to expand on deeper meanings embedded in the data. This process involved interrogation of data and forced me to consider elements beyond the theme itself, drawing on relationships across and between themes and cross tabulation with demographics, observations and literature. This phase resulted in evidence-based findings as each of my findings were validated by being rooted in the data itself and relied on the creation of reports from my data to substantiate my findings.

Phase 8: Involved my ***synthesizing analytical memos*** into a coherent, cohesive and well supported outcome statement or findings and discussion chapter to offer a descriptive account of my study participants' views and perceptions of reading comprehension.

Table 3.5 links these stages and processes conducted in NVivo to the practical guidelines for data analysis and interpretation as set out by Smith (2008):

Table 3.5: Links stages and processes conducted in NVivo to the practical guidelines for data analysis and interpretation

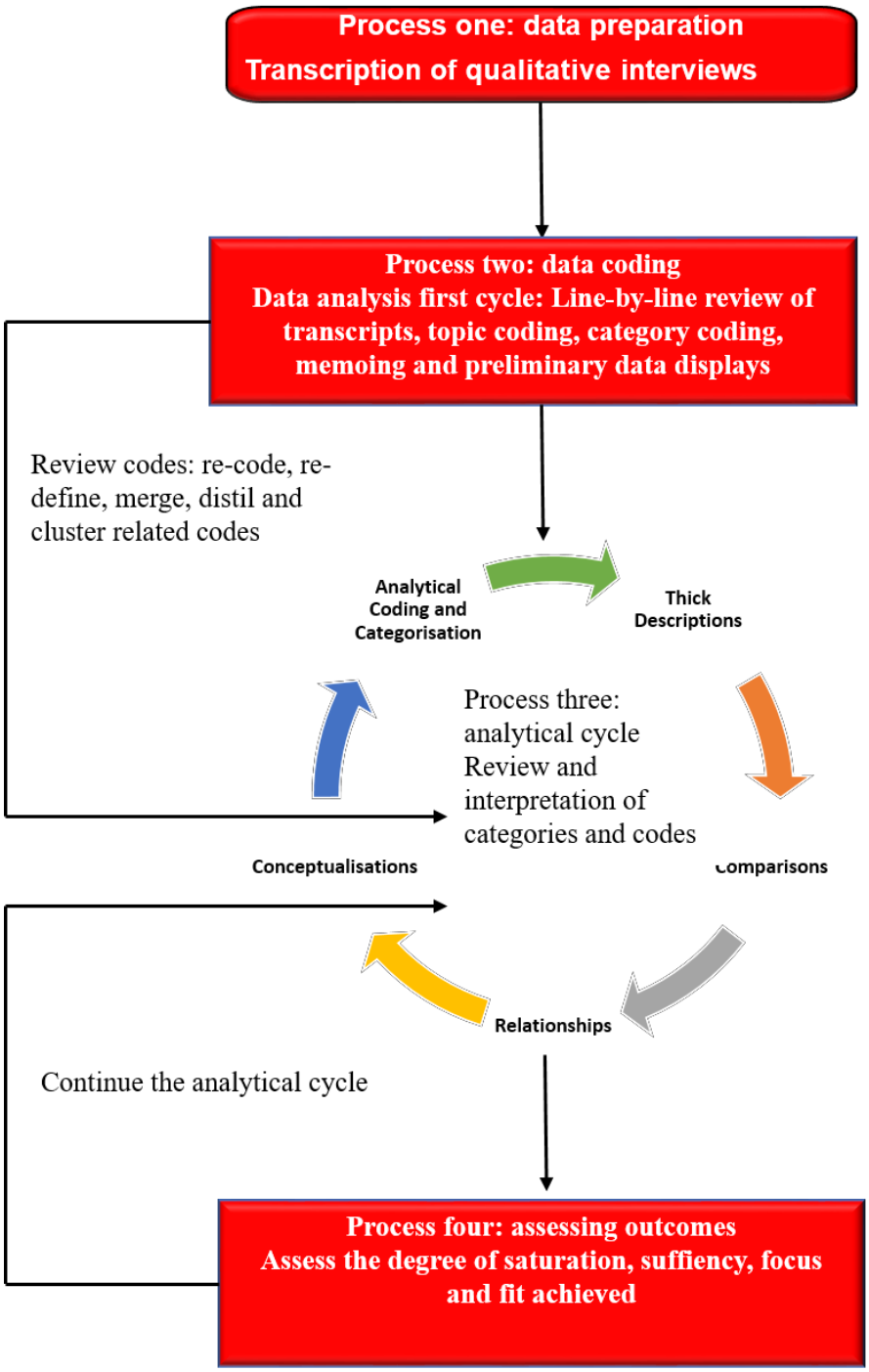
IPA analytical focus (Smith et al. 2009)	NVivo
Steps 1 & 2: Reading and Initial Noting Complete immersion in the original data (interview transcripts) and initial noting. To attend to the participant and focus on the sense and meanings they make about their experiences – hopefully moving from the broad and general to specific details about events. Initial noting examines language use and semantic content 'on a very exploratory level'(p.83) and the ways the participant uses language to address issues relevant to the research questions. The aim is to produce detailed, comprehensive descriptive notes and exploratory comments on the data rather than seek out meaning units at this stage. Three main processes are involved: 1. Descriptive comments on the content of the transcript 2.Linguistic comments on how the participant has used language 3. Conceptual (interrogative and reflexive) comments to start interpreting the text.	**Open coding** As far as possible the participant's own words are used to summarise the sense or meaning that he is trying to convey about a specific experience from the transcript. Open codes ('nodes' in NVivo) are created for the participant's transcript. Codes aim to make a first pass at reducing the original data to descriptive phrases and notes. This is an iterative process–going through each transcript several times to code and re-code and to add comments, both interrogative and reflexive as follows: 1.Code Names capture the summary overall description of the content 2. Rich descriptive comments to provide coding transparency are included in the Code Description 3. A journal captures reflexive and conceptual comments arising from the interview
Step 3: Developing emerging themes. The researcher attempts to reduce the volume of data (by summarising) while retaining its complexity by looking for patterns and connections. The hermeneutic circle (Gadamer 2013; Grondin 2003; Heidegger 2012) concerns interpreting the part of the transcript in relation to the whole and the whole in relation to the part. Themes should be 'a synergistic process of description and interpretation' (p.92), reflecting both the participant's original words and thoughts and the researcher's interpretation–'capturing an understanding'.	**Category creation** As the first step in data reduction, a new 'Category' folder for the participant's transcript in NVivo holds a copy of the set of open codes, so leaving the original open codes folder for the participant intact. Then reviewing each code in the category folder, reordering codes into broad categories (codes are added to other codes either as parent or, more usually as child codes), merged, and re-named, ensuring that new names accurately reflect coded content to allow a more in-depth understanding of the participant's life world.

Step 4: Searching for connections across emergent themes. This step maps how the themes fit together. Several strategies may be helpful: Abstraction: Development of a 'super-ordinate' theme for theme clusters. Subsumption: An emergent theme may naturally become a superordinate theme. Polarization: Looking for differences and similarities – oppositional relationship. Contextualization: Identifying narrative contextual elements: organizing into explicit temporal, cultural and narrative themes can highlight patterns. Numeration: An indication of frequency themes appear. Function: E.g. positive and negative meanings (language/discourse analysis). Bringing it together: Summarising the development of the emergent themes from the raw data in a table or graphic.	**Category Development** Employing IPA strategies to create superordinate themes for clusters of codes. The first step is to consider how categories may be linked or reduced further into emergent themes. New names are created for category themes that reflect both the descriptive and the interpretative to create 'superordinate' themes. For example, reducing risk, avoiding risk, and taking a risk may all be clustered under one theme, e.g.'attitudes to risk'. The aim is to reduce the original data down to between three and six themes that are relevant to the research question: consolidating codes into a more abstract and conceptual map of a final framework of nodes.
Step 5: Moving to the next case Repeating all the previous steps for each participant without, as far as possible, reference to the other transcripts (i.e. bracketing ideas emerging from one case to the next). IPA's project is a commitment to idiographic analysis. This is a different type of bracketing from epochē, which Husserl (Hopkins 2011) meant to refer to bracketing out the 'natural attitude' or taken-for-grantedness of everyday life, and which Merleau-Ponty (2012) argues is never possible to attain anyway: human perception is always fully embodied and cannot be separated from the world. Bracketing as used by Smith et al. simply means to allow new structures to emerge with each case, yet being aware that the 'fore-structures' (hermeneutics) have inevitably changed and been influenced by what was previously found.	**Next Transcript** A new open codes folder is created in NVivo in which to store the new codes created for each participant's transcript separate from other transcripts. Each transcript is therefore treated as a new analysis (i.e. corresponding to Steps1-4) as far as possible bracketing out references to codes in other transcripts.

Step 6: Looking for patterns across cases. Looking at themes across participants to detect patterns. Looking for connections, do themes from one case illuminate another? Which themes are the most potent? This process can result in moving towards a more theoretical level of analysis as individual themes or superordinate themes may also reflect higher order concepts shared by all cases. The analysis so far has gone from the part to the whole. This is now reversed and the whole looked at in terms of each part. Also recurrence of themes across cases is considered. For a superordinate theme to be classed as recurrent it has to be present in at least half of cases and best case across all participant interviews.	**Consolidation and Matrix coding** Emergent themes from the participant's transcript are copied into a common 'Themes' folder where they are all merged together for the first time (leaving the category folders for each participant intact). A process of merging and further consolidation of superordinate themes may be conducted within the Themes folder. A specific type of query in NVivo (Matrix Coding) produces a table which shows participants in columns and themes in rows. This can be used to look at themes both between and within participants' transcripts (Appendix[4]).

In the design of the data analysis steps as outlined in Table 3.5, I considered the aim of my study and its underlying philosophical foundation. King (2004) states that tensions exist 'between the need to be open to the data and the need to impose some shape and structure on the analytical process' (p.267). My objective was to design and undertake a systematic and disciplined data analysis process that encouraged completeness and impartiality (Lillis, 1999), while also recognising the complexity of the data under review and the interpretative nature of my study. As Figure 1 illustrates, my data analysis process involved four inter-linked and iterative processes (i) Process one: data preparation, (ii) Process two: data coding, (iii) Process three: analytical cycle and (iv) Process four: assessing conceptualisations and outcomes.

Figure 3.1: Overview of the Analytical Process applied to the Interview Transcripts



Process three: analytical cycle is adapted from Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011)

3.13 Themes present in the data

It is important to ensure that the themes I identified are not just a reflection of my own prejudices, but are actually present in the data. In employing skills of critique and analysis

I exercised the ability to go beyond describing what is in the data. I also endeavoured to demonstrate the ability to abstract and synthesis; seeing threads and linking elements, moving between data, literature, research questions and theory. Skills of reflexion and reflection enabled me to make sense of and transform the data, sifting trivia from significance, identifying themes, making judgments, and being open. Looking at the relationships across the data, relationships between the respondents, and relations between the emerging themes also assisted me with the process of analysis. I considered the meaning generated by 'Respondent generated metaphors' (Cousin, 2009: 48) as they provided interesting nuanced descriptions of participants' views. Listing assertions that were supported by the data also enabled me to identify emerging themes.

Keeping a reflective research diary was useful for notes and ideas, as ideas emerged from the data and the process (Bell, 2005). Not losing sight of my research questions was also imperative throughout, as these are my foundation and I aimed to provide answers to them. As I went through the processes of identifying meaning from the data, I remained faithful to the perspectives of the study participants, but with wider social and theoretical relevance (O'Leary, 2005).

3.14 Ethical Considerations

The British Educational Research Association (BERA) in its publication 'Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research' (2004), advises that all educational research should be conducted with an ethical respect for the person, knowledge, democratic values, the quality of educational research and academic freedom.

In relation to choosing a sampling plan, Miles and Huberman (1994:34) suggest that the researcher should ask: 'Is the sampling plan *ethical*, in terms of such issues such as informed consent, potential benefits and risks, and the relationship with informants?' I addressed all of these potential issues and I already gained ethical approval from the

University of Lincoln prior to commencing my project (see Appendix 10). Issues also addressed related to the moral acceptance of the research topic and existing codes of ethics which applied to the project. Data collection was morally defensible. The data obtained is stored in accordance with The Data Protection (Amendment) Act (2003). In light of the advice of Denscombe (2002) I obtained informed consent from all the participants in order to have findings reported in this research (see Appendix 11). Issues of privacy, anonymity and confidentiality as well as the storing of data and the findings were addressed. This information was conveyed to the interviewees by way of providing them with an information sheet (see Appendix 12) about the research project and I also obtained their signed consent on a consent form (see Appendix 11). These documents were already approved by the University of Lincoln as part of my ethical approval (EA2) application which was granted prior to my conducting my three pilot interviews (one with a principal teacher, one with a SET and one with a parent) for the completion of my pilot study. Participants were reassured that anonymity would be assured in relation to the contents of information obtained during interviews. Anonymity was also assured by reassuring participants that their names would not be used. Signed consent was gained from all participants before participating in the interview process (See Appendix 13). At the outset, all interviewees consented to participating in the research, however, they were clearly informed in relation to how they could withdraw from the process at any time if they so wished. Since the participating schools were schools that I did not have direct contact with at the time, there was less of a possibility of a conflict of interest arising than may have potentially arisen if I had interviewed schools with whom I would have been professionally involved.

Qualitative data included information from interviews which I conducted with parents (see Appendix 11), principal teachers (see Appendix 8), mainstream class teachers (see Appendix 9) and learning support/special education teachers (see Appendix 10). The interview questions contained a combination of both open ended and closed questions in order to elicit as much information as possible. MacIntyre (2000) suggests that when research is being undertaken, the use of interviews is appropriate but warns that the perspective of the interviewees be obtained without bias. The use of a Time and Qualitative Log recorded the amount of time spent on each interview and any other comments or relevant information. The fidelity of implementation may have a huge influence on the outcomes therefore it is necessary that all data was collected in this way. Robson (2002:527) contends that 'good research demands clarity of thought and expression in the doing and the reporting.' The above data sources provided triangulation in order to reduce bias (MacIntyre, 2000). Assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were given to the interviewees. The interviews were digitally recorded in order to accurately record the information provided by the interviewees and to allow for transcription. Anonymised data will be held for a maximum of five years. All interview recordings are stored on a password protected computer. This includes the audio recordings from the interviews and the transcripts from the interviews. I used pseudonyms for both schools and participants involved. Interviewees were informed how the data might be used for example in publications or in academic papers.

Particularly as my research included SEN, inclusion, parents and schools, I considered ethical issues relating to this. Foremost in my mind was the notion of beneficence and seeking to do good to benefit participants and my intention was that my research would benefit individual participants and society as a whole (Beauchamp and Childress, 2012; Parahoo, 2014).

3.15 A Reflective Portfolio

A reflective portfolio was maintained as advised by Creswell (2008). This enabled me to reflect on the content of the interviews and on whether or not all my research questions were answered. It was also used as a method of writing personal experiences, thoughts and feelings with a view to understanding personal actions. This enabled me to better understand the conducting of interviews as a created a space within which the interviewee was enabled to articulate their experience. I found this reciprocal exchange very rewarding during the interviews undertaken in this research.

3.16 Conclusion

In conclusion, in this chapter, I provided a rationale for locating this research within the interpretative paradigm. I outlined my epistemological and ontological perspectives and provided an overview of my analytical Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology. I outlined my research design, research questions, sampling, methods of data collection and data analysis strategy. I also identified the themes that were present in the data and the phases and steps taken in my analytical process. The following chapter will detail the results of the data analysis.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I am framing the analysis around the meta-themes that emerged from my data analysis – pedagogy, practice and perception; drawing connections between these and my original literature review to identify themes, similarities/tensions, developments and my new discoveries and contributions; whilst monitoring how these link to the other themes of the models of reading and my research questions. The ultimate aim is to present and discuss the data in such a way that I can draw meaningful conclusions from it, which respond to the aims of my research.

I will re-present my research questions, justify them in relation to the literature, present the data and discuss the significance of it by ascertaining whether it confirms or challenges what was presented in the literature. In my study I endeavoured to understand the complex phenomena of the teaching of Reading Comprehension from the perspectives of the participants who were the people in the process.

The aim of the research is to build a picture of the system of teaching reading comprehension (at both home and school) as it currently exists in order to interpret its strengths and challenges according to principal teachers, mainstream class teachers, learning support teachers and parents of children with SEN and children – and, ultimately, enable principals, teachers and parents to adapt their pedagogical practice to support inclusion of such children.

Within the Irish context, Literacy and Numeracy for learning and life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020 (Department of Education and Skills, 2011:17) sets targets for improving literacy and numeracy standards to be achieved by the year 2020. Some of the key areas aimed at

improving literacy outcomes are building the capacity of school leadership to lead improvements in the teaching of literacy, getting the content of the curriculum for literacy right at primary levels and enabling parents to support children's literacy development. However, Ott (1997) has argued that pupils who present with Special Educational Needs (SEN) within the mainstream school setting present with great problems in the acquisition of reading comprehension skills. I therefore wished to understand how these goals are being met for children with SEN – how principals lead and organise the teaching of reading comprehension through school policy and planning, how teachers translate this into strategies and methods for teaching reading comprehension to children who present with reading difficulties in their classroom settings, and how parents support their children's reading comprehension at home.

The literature review presented in Chapter Two defined the concept of reading comprehension, explored some of the major theories that underpin the reading process, and examined some models of reading instruction that are dominant in discourses. The challenges which may be experienced by a child with SEN in learning to read were then outlined as well as factors which should be considered in the formulation of an inclusive and comprehensive programme in the teaching of reading as well as the role of vocabulary teaching. Profiles of children with reading difficulties were discussed, along with the current research on the role of teacher preparation and comprehension strategies instruction was examined and the parental role in reading was considered as an important factor in the development of reading comprehension.

My analytical strategy supported my making sense of the data in its analysed form culminating in the development of three superordinate themes; pedagogy, perceptions and practices and outlining how I endeavoured to theorise these. These themes constituted a conceptual model for considering how different approaches to reading comprehension for

children with special educational needs in mainstream school settings can be identified and analysed. I am now operating with a holistic model of inclusive practice – it is holistic in the sense of containing these elements, *and* because these themes encompass the experiences of children, parents and teachers. This conceptual model will also be used to challenge the existing models of reading by identifying how each one of these approches pedagogy and practice, and what the underlying assumptions/perceptions of these are. In the analysis I compared the theoretical models of the reading process identified in the literature with the models of reading that I identified in my research, in order to see where there were similarities and differences, and particularly identify effective practices and gaps that should be filled. A framework for data analysis was developed by treating each case separately in the first instance and describing findings in the three main thematic areas that emerged from my initial analysis (pedagogy, practice, perception) through the lenses of each of the groups of people I interviewed. Taking each school individually as its own case enabled me to examine the data through the lens of my themes. Adopting this framework enabled me to ascertain what was occurring pedagogically, practically and perceptually for each of my groups of participants and this was my rationale for conducting a multiple case study. This initially enabled me to compare my cases and this is justification for why I conducted a multiple case study.

4.2 Perceptions

When I was analysing this data, the theme that I labelled "perceptions" clearly emerged as being the very personal beliefs or opinions that these particular participants were holding. Therefore it was important to capture that, because these perceptions gave rise to the kinds of practices and pedagogy that participants identified. Perceptions in this context are considered as beliefs and opinions held by my participants based on how things seem in relation to my research agenda as well as their awareness and understanding of the issues discussed. This section presents data obtained from parents in relation to the strategies that

they had identified that would support the development of reading comprehension skills within the context of home based literacy.

4.2.1 Parental Perceptions

Both parental perspectives and school perspectives were identified in the study. Parental perspectives included the following: Child's Attitude to Reading, Courses for Parents, Homework, Needs Identified by Parents, Parental Input, Parental Involvement, Evidence from Parents, Reading Ability, Reading Programme Provision and Support from School. Hannon (1995) notes the importance of involving parents in literacy teaching while but recognises that the theoretical understandings of why and how to do it has often lagged behind practice. Therefore, the case for parental involvement, based on results of research into literacy development and home learning should be persuasively argued and a theoretical framework to underpin practice put forward. In relation to this, an important element of my research was to identify strategies that foster and develop reading comprehension skills not only within the inclusive school setting but also within the context of home based literacy. The following data is representative of a group of parents and the quotes were chosen because they are exemplary of their perceptions of their child's attitude to reading, the need for courses for parents, homework, their child's reading ability, reading programme provision and support from school.

4.2.2 Child's Attitude to Reading

In all of the schools, all parents reported that their child had a negative attitude to reading. Mary (Parent, School C), referring to her child's negative attitude to reading, said: '*but that* [reading] *is a chore rather than a pleasurable thing like, and it's just kind of, I'd love her to get into it, the reading like*'. Betty (Parent, School A) concluded:

> *He wouldn't be a natural... if he was to go into a toy shop, he wouldn't veer to the book section. You know, he's not going to be a book worm and I think that still stems from the fact that he thinks that well, it's too hard, you know.*

Lyn (Parent, School E) indicated:

> *I don't think he'd try anything because basically he'd tell you he doesn't like reading and he doesn't like school, so that kind of, nearly overrides everything. He won't push himself to find his way around investigating how it could be done properly because he just thinks it's just all boring, and he doesn't like it*.

Two parents also believed that their child's negative attitude could be eliminated if their child had acquired the necessary skills to become a competent reader or if they portrayed an interest in the reading material. Orla (Parent, School D) supports this idea by indicating:

> *He's in bed with a book in his hand and he's flicking through the pages and looking at the pictures and you know that he wants to actually read it, like you know, so he does try, you know he does, he does and if he gets the skill of reading he would be a reader.*

Lena (Parent, School B) confirms the association between competency in reading and liking the material: '*he'd read the book and he'd struggle to read it... He likes to read about computer games, he likes diaries, he likes if there's funny things, funny things happening in it*.' These findings suggest that a child's negative attitude could be overcome if a child has acquired the necessary skills to become a competent reader or if they portrayed an interest in the reading material and they also show a correlation between competency in reading and liking the material. The provision of courses for parents could help bridge the gap between home and school.

4.2.3 Courses for Parents

Concurring with the idea that children's initial induction into literacy in the early years should be a collaboration between the primary school, in partnership with the home and the wider community (Poulson,1998), two parents outlined that they needed help from the school by way of being provided with a short course or some information to enable them to assist their children with reading acquisition skills. Lyn (Parent, School E) suggested:

> *If the children in school are identified as being needing support then to offer their parents an opportunity to have some input into how we could better support them in terms of either coming to meetings, to meet as a group of parents, to meet the teacher and say this is what I'd like you to do, maybe, A, B, C, D, and see how we're getting on, either come back in a month or two months or whatever, or keep going if you're ok, that yes I suppose, I suppose to, to have interaction with the, the specialised teacher that is offering the support in terms of them communicating with the parents as to, as to what we actually physically A, B, C, D steps need to do.*

Orla (Parent, School D) revealed that she had enlisted the help of a privately paid tutor for providing her child with help in reading outside of school time and who also assisted her with some skills that would enable her to help her child with reading comprehension:

> *The help* [from the privately pain tutor] *that I got to up-skill myself, its, they're simple steps but they're so effective and it doesn't take much to explain that to a parent and the difference it would make to a child is phenomenal.*

Orla suggested that this service should be available from the school:

> *Yes, it should be from junior infants on, for somebody to sit down and say to you, you're starting with a blank sheet here. And just the first words to say to a parent about reading comprehension is that a child doesn't automatically understand what they read, some kids might, but there are kids that don't, you might have a child like that so make sure you know these are the steps, this is what we* [the school] *are going to show you know, we're going to have a programme set out. What I would like is this and not this rote, standard way of teaching every child, because every child is different.*

According to this data, we can infer that parents need help from the school by way of being provided with a short course or some information to enable them to assist their children with reading acquisition skills. This concurs with the recommendation that curriculum and pedagogy would shift towards commitment to the learning community as successful early childhood intervention programmes have positive implications for future learning (Sylva, 2000). The areas of emergent literacy that contribute to reading skills and in which parents could be upskilled, include phonological awareness, letter/alphabetic knowledge, print concepts, vocabulary and word recognition. Enabling parents in the activity of shared book reading in the home, would impact emergent literacy and word recognition skill (Evans and Shaw, 2008).

Parents can be enabled to develop prerequisite skills to support their children's reading development. One such activity could include nurturing the child's independent reading level in which the parent can assume the role of reading coach. Teaching letter names and sounds, attracting the child's attention to print and its form and purpose collectively enable the development of parent– child writing activities. Shared book reading using alphabet and rhyming books enable the expansion of vocabulary. The following data also revealed how input into how to support their child at home could assist with the completion of homework assignments.

4.2.4 Homework

Parental perceptions in relation to homework revealed that this is an area that poses many challenges for parents as four parents in the study revealed. One parent (Betty, School A) suggested that differentiated homework for her struggling child was a very helpful strategy when she stated: '*when he was struggling, the teacher would have set aside, instead of giving him eight questions to answer on his English programme, she might have brought it down to four.*'

Lena (Parent, School B) outlined a typical homework session with her child:

> *We sit down and we read that, and he will start to struggle, after about three pages you can see him, kind of, ok this is getting a bit you know, he's finding it a bit long concentration wise, it is a little bit long for him. There was one night he must have missed a night and he had a lot* [of homework]*, well I said you have to read you know, so I did a half with him, then stopped and took a break and did something else, went back to it, and then read the rest of it because he, I feel that there's no point putting him, there's no point reading it and not understanding it you know. So I just get a break, it's like he had a maths meltdown yesterday and I just said, right just leave the maths till the end and we'll do something else you know.*

Lyn (Parent, School E) stresses the importance of establishing a good routine and the importance of reading to her child:

> *Every night I would read to the child you know, we wouldn't have the television on coming up to bedtime. I'd be encouraging you know to do things through learning, through reading, rather than been distracted by we'll say computers or the hand held electronic devices that wouldn't encourage reading.*

Orla (Parent, School D) agrees that reading to her child eliminates the stress of him having to write about the story:

> *So I'm reading the books to him and his younger sister and he's getting the whole thing of the whole story you know and he'll sit back and he'll listen to it and he enjoys it because it's read to him and he sees the fun that a book can be you know the story can be and there's no pressure on him. He loves it because there's no pressure on him to write it and it's been read to him and he's getting the benefit of it and enjoying it.*

Storytelling has a therapeutic role and it is a good way in which families can help children to discuss their feelings (Sunderland, 2000). Homework is an area that poses many challenges for parents and differentiating homework tasks to suit the needs of the child, leaving more difficult tasks until the end of the homework session and establishing good homework routines and making time to read together were all advocated by these parents. However, further needs were also identified.

4.2.5 Needs Identified by Parents

Parents identified many needs that they would like to have met and this data is representative of four of the parents interviewed in relation to this theme. Mary (Parent, School C) identifies communication with the school as potentially very helpful by asserting:

> *You know, just a book, we're all working off you know and what we're doing at home, we sign it, we date it and we, she brings it in and says ok this you know, chapter is, we have it covered at home and see where they are at school and if they're ahead of me at home, well then ok we need to be doing you know what's the difference and how can I get her to where she should be you know, but it's just kind of there's no communication with the school at all and I just don't have the time.*

Ann added: '*But they haven't kind of said, well look this is what we need you to be doing and this is how to do it.*' Betty (Parent, School A) highlighted the need for helping parents

by way of establishing support groups for parents and pointing parents in the way of enlisting the assistance of outside services and agencies by commenting:

> *Well I think it would be quite good for parents to actually come together and have like a group that, because I think a lot of parents feel very much that is it only their child and that there is help out there and maybe to feel that they can come in and ask freely you know for help. Or you know in terms of reading comprehension things like that so maybe there should be more pamphlets or handouts that could you know, you could give where it says this is the information that we have here, this is what we're doing here in the school but if you require this information you can go further on for further information. You know people sometimes don't know where they can go other than when they go to the school, so maybe if the school were to say right if you want to go there's an organisation here or if you want to get together with these, something like that or get together with other parents maybe.*

Betty (Parent, School A) also spoke of the stigma that she feels many parents might feel:

> *I do think sometimes there's a slight stigma involved in some of these areas you know that people kind of don't want to admit that they feel that it's sort of a failing on their part that maybe is it something I did, did I not do enough to start off with, did I not do enough with them, did I not you know and that maybe you know people don't speak about it enough. I just think it would be nice to know that there are supports outside of school, as well you know, and maybe I think reading groups for children would be lovely.*

It is possible therefore that communication with the school be open and two-way by way of a journal proving home-school links. The provision of support groups, information pamphlets of information containing information about relevant outside organisations as well as the establishment of reading groups for children were all implied. Thus, the concept of family literacy is necessary, as many skills of early reading can be missed by teachers whose training has been confined to literacy for instruction only (Meek, 1988). The view that reading to children before they go to school is now both widely and wisely recommended (Meek,1991) was also supported in my findings as well as the need for keeping parents involved in aspects of their children's schooling.

4.2.6 Parental Input

Involving parents in a project where they were helped to enhance their children's literacy skills was considered a powerful learning tool for them and also for their children

(Weinberger and Stafford, 2004). This evidence outlines how a parent can help their child in the home context.

One parent, Lyn (Parent, School E) identified parental input as being an important factor in addressing her child's reading difficulties:

> *He doesn't like reading, spontaneous reading, so up to this year the input has been bringing a library book home and we would read the library book at night time for his reading skill enhancement and the book has always been chosen by the child but the teacher has directed towards topics that he likes, like farming or animals or things that he actually likes being with to encourage the reading experience.*

Lyn also identifies home-school communication as being very important and advises the use of a communication system between home and school:

> *Because of our communication in the notebook I would have, I would have been able to say to her if there was issues going on or problems going on. That system is now changed in third class there's no longer homework or a copy book coming home and yes there isn't I feel there isn't a structure in place now.'*

It thus can be suggested that a communication notebook between home and school can be very useful and this in turn can enable parents to feel more involved in how their child is progressing at school.

4.2.7 Parental Involvement

The concept of improving reading comprehension poses enormous problems (Paris and Hamilton, 2009). This arising theme explores how parents feel the ways in which teachers need to translate the strategies in the classroom (including the skills taught and how this is achieved in content areas) to enable parents to help their child in the home context.

Regarding involving parents; one principal, two special education teachers, two mainstream class teachers and one parent identified strategies that could help parents to assist their child with reading comprehension difficulties at home. Amanda (Principal, School B) suggested:

> *Asking parents to help, asking to make parents aware of what kind of questions children need to be asked, that they are not all literal, you know, it's not like exactly what they read in the text, that they're you know, that they go behind the text, ask more inferential questions, and that they are looking beyond the literal. So I think helping parents to do that is a big help and again when you are doing it, when you are doing reading with each individual child that you would be aware of that and ask, and question on that level, and that's actually true for all children not just children with special education needs.*

This notion is also supportive of inclusive education. Further evidence of teachers suggesting how support could be given at home came from Carrie (SET, School D), who articulated:

> *They sit beside the child and they would pick a book that the child has interest in, the mother would read out loud, make yourself nice and cosy and read out loud and then when the child feels when he wants to read, you would have an agreed system say, where he nudges you* [the mother] *and then you stop and then the child starts reading.*

And from Lorna (SET, School B), who reported:

> *Giving parents guidelines yes, we should usually kind of give the parents some guidelines you know when we start the books with them, what they can do you know like the books, they're taking home, help the children with those you know the talking about, the pictures and you know rather than focus on just reading the words you know what I mean how to foster like the prediction, the retelling about those kind of things there important so we would give them some guidelines on that.*

How schools could enable parents to assist their child at home was also reflected by Mari (Class Teacher, School A) who suggested the following practical programme for parents:

> *The shared reading programme we have in the school at the moment does encourage parents to sit, discuss a book, discuss the title, discuss the text, discuss the pictures, go through the story read over any words that they're unsure of and then basically question the children afterwards. Now we'd hope obviously that this goes on but I think we do give guidelines at the beginning of a year as we start a shared reading programme to help the parents in order to facilitate the development of comprehension through shared reading at home. So I think it does work, I think obviously some places better than others, some homes better than others.*

In further support of enabling parents, Madge (Class Teacher, School B) offers the following advice to parents:

I always say to the parents if you know there's an issue with reading at home, try and get them to pick a book, for an interest they have, so be it farming or dancing or whatever it is and once you have their interest I think then the comprehension will come with that, then once you spark their interest and they're reading then you know just informally. I would always say to them you know sit and I suppose spend the time isn't that it, spend time with the child and ask them questions to tell what do you think that means or can you close the book and tell me about it so far in your own words and then we'll read the next chapter together you know so that they're just not reaming off words and also that it's important that maybe switch off all the televisions and whatever else is going on and just actually spend that time one on one and I think that really helps and maybe parents telling the children about books they read in their own words that's sharing going on I think that would help, that's what I always tell parents to do.

In the absence of a structured system set up in the school Mona (Teacher, School D) describes what she feels should be practiced in schools:

I think if I was a principal of a school I would bring the parents in at the start of the year, I know we do it with infants in our school but I don't think that's enough; I think it should be done every single year. I would love to bring the parents in myself into my class and say look this is what I'm doing this is what I'm hoping to achieve, second best thing when I couldn't do that is I wrote a letter to them, a very long letter explaining my approach and the importance of reading and how I would organise my spellings and how I was going to you know that they're expected, the children are expected to enjoy their reading every night in bed or where ever is a for them. Time out fifteen minutes a night that parents should make sure that the children have comprehended what they read, talk about the story, talk about the cover of the book , what is it about, have they changed their mind, what made them change their mind, the more information they got and so on and so forth yes.

The concept of funding to support inclusion was addressed by Nora (Principal, School A), who outlined that:

The Board [Board of Management, that is, the school's governing body] *is committed now to committing certain funds to introducing the shared, the graded schemes because the teachers have identified that's something that's needed in our school and the Board is committed to help finance towards that and I'm hoping to talk to the parents committee about that as well.*

Regarding helping parents by way of providing school support Nora (Principal, School A) also suggests:

I suppose at parent-teacher meetings and you know at incidental meetings we have with a lot of parents during the year especially maybe with children who are struggling, maybe you talk to them about the whole area of comprehension, giving them a few tips you know. I mean if we start using inference or you know that kind

of thing with parents, you know we lose them immediately because often you know sometimes the children who are, who have special education needs maybe their own parents had special education needs at school as well. So it's just to give those parents the confidence and not to be using terminology that's you know, that's sounds too "teachery" maybe, just give them ideas, simple hints and tips around the whole area of literacy at home and the importance of reading I think is an important thing to start off you know just the importance of reading at home is so important you know that simple tips I think really yes.

Una (SET, School A) describes her practice in relation to assisting parents by pointing out:

Yes, I'd often write notes in the journal or you know at parent-teacher meetings, or I'd often ring parents if I thought there was something to tell them, and if it was in relation to reading comprehension, I suppose I wouldn't send home a sheet or anything telling them how to do reading comprehension with your child I suppose.

John (Principal, School C) echoes the need for schools to support parents and described an afterschool homework club initiative operating in his school and stated that:

Some of that [homework club activities] *can be based on comprehension exercises and things like that, we've fourteen children working in the homework club afterschool, part of the DEIS funding is used, and actually two parents come in and work with the learning support teacher in that room who is working with their child and as I said because they would struggle academically themselves part of it would be reading.*

DEIS funding is used to pay for the teacher's afterschool services. Jane (Class Teacher, School C) described the organisation of a class-based intervention where parents were included:

It was called Literacy Lift-Off and basically what we did was we tested the children prior to implementing it and we divided them up into groups according to their level of ability. So we had actually reading ages from about five to nine and that was senior infants and first that I had at the time which was a very wide range of ability and what we did then we had five groups, so we had to bring parents in. We wouldn't have been able to deal with it all ourselves so we had myself, the teacher, we had a learning support teacher, we had the special needs assistant down for that hour and we had two parents in over the courses of the week. So we did it four days a week and we spent ten minutes doing at each, we had five stations, we spent ten minutes at each station.

Maureen (Principal, School E) adds that as part of SSE, enabling parents was highlighted as an area of concern in her school and in order to remediate this asserts:

> *We sent out a page because of our SSE our school self evaluation programme that we are implementing at the moment. We did send out a comprehensive letter to parents on how they can help their children with their reading at home and we had one at junior level and one at senior level and it was tips for parents in how to help their children at pre- reading, during reading and post reading and we also gave them samples of what type of questions to ask them, what type of… like.. inference.. strategies like that… asking… getting the parents involved….and about the different genres of reading… and to encourage them to read newspapers and to encourage them to summarise , recall and repeat everything that they have read.*

Joe (Class Teacher, School E) explained how this translated into practice:

> *The parents were asked at the start of the year to do the same as we did, discuss the book, so start at the title and I know if it's your second time reading it, it doesn't work, you know, because you have the book for two days, but at the start, discuss the title, discuss the pictures, what do you think it's going to be about spend time on each page talk about the pictures on each page.*

Sheila (SET, School E) advocates involving parents and ensuring that both school and home are addressing the same issues in the same way by highlighting: '*very much involving parents but you have to make sure that they're singing from the same songsheet* [as the school] *I think that's really important.*'

In order to facilitate the involvement of parents, there is a need for schools to help parents by providing guidance in the following areas: questioning skills, techniques for shared reading, reading to and with children, appropriate choice of books, explanation of the yearly class programme, comprehension strategies, class-based interventions such as Literacy Lift-Off that includes parents. Boards of Management need to provide funding for resources that will support the children with SEN. Schools need regular contact with parents and involve parents in the school self-evaluation process in order to ascertain the help that parents need as this will have a direct bearing on the home situation.

The extracts above also demonstrate that home factors have a great bearing on the development of literacy progress in general according to the National Child Development

Study carried out within the UK by Davie et al. (1972). Studies carried out by Tizard et al (1982), Beverton et al. (1993) and Poulson et al. (1997) concur with my findings.

4.2.8 Evidence from Parents

Regarding the collecting of data from parents in relation to fulfilling their needs in the area of reading comprehension one principal, one class teacher and one parent provided evidence pertaining to this area. Amanda (Principal, School B) admitted that she had not done this: '*I haven't collected any evidence.*' Lyn (Parent, School E) explains:

> *Parents don't come into the school, parents haven't been, we'll say taught about how to read a story to a child or haven't, yes haven't been told or taught the importance of reading, except that reading is very good for your child, you know, the kind of, the theory behind why reading is important hasn't been passed onto the parents.*

Jane (Class Teacher, School C) comments:

> *I always did up a letter outlining the different stages of what we were going to be doing between September and October, and then from October to November and then November to December and explaining very clearly to the parents what they should be doing every night, because a lot of us assume that parents know what they should be doing, but generally parents don't, and they like to be told, well most of them, some of them don't.*

Parents need to be taught some basic skills in the teaching of reading and they need to be informed about the progression of their child's programme during the school year as a support to enhancing the child's reading ability.

Formally ascertaining the perceptions of parents and collecting data from parents was not very much in evidence from the data that I collected from schools pertaining to this issue. Evidence of this is highlighted in the responses of four parents and two teachers. Betty (Parent, School A) responded that: '*I don't think now we* [parents] *have received any questionnaires from the school, no*.' Lena's (Parent, School B) response corresponds with this by ascertaining that: '*No, they'd never give me a questionnaire*.' Lyn (Parent, School

E) advised:

> *The only thing that came home from school was a small little questionnaire on the general reading trends in the household. So you know... what kind of books you read and how often you'd read to a child. There was nothing sent by way of asking you as a parent what you'd need. No questionnaire asking parents about helping your child at home.*

When Orla (Parent, School D) was asked if she had received any questionnaires from the school for her to complete as a parent to assert what her needs were or what help she would like to get from the school her reply was: "*No nothing, no nothing*". Nora (Principal, School A) states regarding the gathering of data from parents:

> *I don't mean to be facetious now but I don't know if they* [parents] *realise what reading comprehension really is as such. I don't know if they* [parents] *realise how a child is struggling with the comprehension as much as we* [teachers] *might identify it. I don't know because they* [parents] *often see reading I suppose in a traditional way, maybe the way we* [teachers] *were taught ourselves, the 'barking at print' you know, without having any understanding.*

Of the entire cohort of principals interviewed, only one; Maureen (Principal, School E) reported having formally sent information to parents:

> *As part of our school self evaluation programme (SSE) that we are implementing at the moment, we did send out a comprehensive letter to parents about how they can help their children with their reading at home and we had one* [letter] *at junior level and one* [letter] *at senior level and it was tips for parents in how to help their children at pre- reading, during reading and post reading. We also gave them samples of what type of questions to ask them, like inference strategies, getting the parents involved….and about the different genres of reading…and to encourage them* [children] *to read newspapers and to encourage them* [children] *to summarise, recall and repeat everything that they* [children] *have read.*

These findings reveal that parents received very little help from the school or did not receive questionnaires asking them to ascertain their needs and opinions. It is proposed that there is a need for schools to engage parents in the SSE process and this good inclusive practice concurs with Meek (1988:7) who advocated the concept of family literacy. Gleaning evidence from parents would support teachers by adding this to support teacher's own evidence base.

4.2.9 Reading Ability

A number of projects have highlighted the links between home and school such as the association between lack of books in the home and school achievement as contained in the Plowden Report (CACE, 1967; Evans and Shaw, 2008). There are strong correlations between children's emergent literacy knowledge at the time of entering pre-school and their reading ability five years later (Smith, 1997). Children who present with poor text comprehension but portray fluent and accurate word reading are impaired on a wide range of tasks that are reading-related and weak vocabulary skills lead to impaired development in word reading ability and weak general cognitive ability lead to impaired advancement in comprehension (Cain and Oakhill, 2006). Children who present with poor comprehension ability are at risk of poor educational attainment generally, although poor verbal or cognitive skills appear to affect the reading development of poor comprehenders in various ways.

All parents interviewed acknowledged that their children had a low reading ability and that they were performing well behind their class level. Mary (Parent, School C) discovered:

> *If she's looking at a piece of comprehension for the first time we'll say on a Monday, she would rely quite a bit on sounding out but by the Friday and because of the repetitive nature of learning she would know it but sometimes she's learning it off by heart you know so as not to be kind of found out.*

Betty (Parent, School A) is conscious of the fact that her child is also very aware of his own difficulties and as a result he will declare: '*I'm not reading in the class, I'm not reading out loud'.* Lena (Parent, School B) reports that her child did not possess the skills to enable him to read fluently: *'I know when it was a struggle to him he wouldn't have been reading as much because he wasn't enjoying it, because he was finding it so hard to figure the words out and he couldn't understand it.'*

Lyn (Parent, School E) finds that her child's inability to integrate phonics is a hindrance to his reading progress:

> *He has a difficulty translating the phonics sometimes into words, you know, so I feel what he's doing is he might phonoise* [sound out phonetically] *or whatever the word is, might do that but still the word by reappearing again a page or two later and he still might have to redo that rather than recognising it as a word he saw two pages back.'*

Orla (Parent, School D) cited the following issues that need to be addressed in order that her child would become a competent reader:

> *He struggles with his reading he; he is way behind in his reading for his age. He panics when he comes to a word that he doesn't automatically recognise, and he doesn't know how to break it down. The thing about him that amazes me is that he loves to pick up a book, he really wants to read, but he doesn't feel the confidence in himself either. Sometimes he picks up a book and he goes through it and he says I've read that now you know and I know he hasn't actually tried to read it, but when I actually sit down with him one on one in a quiet environment he'll respond better.*

When asked if the child was able to transfer reading skills taught in isolation Orla responded:

> *No, he couldn't cope with them, couldn't cope with them at all, couldn't cope with them at all and it's one book* [for all of the class] *it is the same for them all in the class and it's just standard and as it got harder he struggled and struggled and struggled it got worse.*

Regarding the application of phonetic rules she responded: *He wasn't applying them. He knew that they were rules but to put them into action was another thing, he just couldn't.*

Regarding reading comprehension acquisition skills Orla replied:

> *He hadn't a clue, he really didn't have a clue it was just something he read and I'd say what did you read and he'd get flustered. He really didn't understand that there was a story to what he was reading and that it made sense and that there was a purpose to his reading. He thought it* [reading] *was something that he had to do and he didn't see the reason for it and that he was going to actually get anything out of it for himself. He needs to learn that skill of sounding out and putting it together. He's just not able to apply it and for it* [reading] *to be just a flow for him and to be automatic, it's just not automatic for him you know that's his greatest difficulty.*

Regarding reading ability, some children when unable to read, employ different coping strategies in order not to be 'found out' and dislike reading in class and reading aloud. Inability to integrate phonics and laboriously having to 'sound out' words hinders comprehension, while lack of differentiated material that is selected according to the need of the child also hinders progress. The development of a reading programme for children with SEN, which considers the difficulty which they may experience with transfer of learning and generalisation of skills, needs an integrated and inclusive approach. As highlighted by the findings of Eilers and Pinkley (2006) whilst there is a lot of testing of comprehension, instruction in comprehension pedagogy (teaching) is lacking and therefore if my evidence is used to develop a programme which enhances this, then the elements of that programme needs to include instruction in the development of comprehension skills.

This is the reason, according to my evidence why a programme, based on the knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the individual pupil, which adopts an inclusive and multi-sensory approach addresses the challenges experienced by a child presenting with SEN and is necessary in reading programme provision (Carey, 2005).

4.2.10 Reading Programme Provision

The evidence from all parents interviewed is unequivocal in highlighting the perception that if they had a working knowledge of the reading programme that their child is following at school, then this would be of enormous benefit in the home context. Betty (Parent, School A) describes and advocates a shared reading system in use in her child's school:

> *The shared reading system then is a book that they pick themselves once a week, take it out, they have a little note, a little booklet and they write down the name of the book and how many pages, there's no onus on them to read the whole book in one night. The parents must sign it at night, sit with them, read with them, discuss the book and whatever. So that's a great system, the shared reading system is brilliant because it really gets them interested in reading and I find if James hasn't it set by the school, he's not one of these children who'd instinctively go of an evening and say I'll just go and read for a while you know so I would have to say to*

> *him James come on, the shared reading has to be done and signed, so it makes him read more than he possibly otherwise would.*

Lena (Parent, School B) describes her willingness to support the work of the school and up-skilled herself on her own initiative:

> *I knew all about the Jolly Phonics* [phonological awareness teaching programme] *and we got books ourselves as well and I got the Flash Cards and everything, like, I went to the Early Learning Centre* [educational equipment retailers] *and they had all that stuff there, so we did probably get a bit extra.*

The evidence above suggests that parents would like to have a working knowledge of their child's reading programme and advocate the implementation of a shared reading programme as well as a great willingness on their behalf to up-skill themselves if support was provided for them from the school. In the early stages of learning to read the best curricula offers an amalgam of elements, including reading for meaning, reading for thinking, experience with high quality literature, systematic instruction in phonics, systematic instruction in reading comprehension skills, development of sight vocabulary and ample opportunities to read (Lerner, 2006). In order that parents be up skilled in this area support from school is necessary.

4.2.11 Support from School

There was a consensus reached among all of the parents interviewed that support from school was inconsistent and varied. Many parents cited the need for sustained support in a coherent way. Mary (Parent, School C) recalls the shock of being told of her child's diagnosis:

> *Because you're just told your child is dyslexic and it was the last thing I expected to hear on that particular day you know, and that was it.*

Betty (Parent, School A) speaking of her own inadequacies around helping her child noticed that:

> *A lot of parents don't have knowledge of what to do and they kind of feel that, well,*

> *sure look, they're at school doing it, isn't that enough? Sure they are grand, they're getting on grand at school but that's fine for the children that don't struggle, because they're retaining it.*

Lena (Parent, School B) explains how she felt it necessary to organise an appointment with her child's teacher in order to get help and support:

> *I had to go in, sit down and talk to her* [the teacher]. *We* [Lena and her partner] *had a meeting with her and she had to explain how she did it* [reading comprehension] *with him.*

Lyn (Parent, School E) revealed:

> *It took such a fight for me to get support services in place where he was going to get special support. I feel I'm well able to fight my cause and I feel I'd be good at trying to get what my child was entitled to but God help all the people out there who don't know, can't recognise that their child, their children have issues and don't know how to go about doing something about it you know.*

Orla (Parent, School D) responded '*No I don't, no, no I don't*' when asked if she as a parent felt supported and enabled by the school to help her child with the development of reading comprehension skills. When asked if she received any information from the school for example pamphlets or information or talks about reading comprehension or ways to help her child with reading, she replied: *'No, no absolutely nothing'*. She indicated that there were no supports put in place for her as a parent when she was told by the school that her child had a difficulty in reading. Orla explained:

> *I didn't get the help* [from the school] *only my own up-skilling, nothing from the school. After I up-skilled myself from a privately paid tutor that I had employed to help my child after school there was a huge improvement in this ability to answer questions you know, it made sense to him. You know it made sense to him, there's a huge difference in the child, he's getting confidence now and a bit of self esteem and he's beginning to realise that this isn't as bad as he thought it was. He has a purpose for reading now, a huge difference in him, in his ability as well; yes a huge difference from my up-skilling.*

Support from schools is inconsistent, varied, often not available at all and often parents have to fight for adequate support for their child and pay privately to up-skill themselves and pay for private tuition for their child. Parents need to be supported from the point at

which their child's difficulty is diagnosed and throughout the duration of their child's schooling.

4.3 School Perceptions

This section presents data obtained from principals, class teachers and special education teachers in relation to the strategies that they identified would support the development of reading comprehension skills within the context of inclusive practice in schools. The preparation of the teacher for comprehension strategy instruction was a finding that was highlighted by many teachers as a necessary component of teacher preparation that is often lacking. School Perceptions identified within the study included: Attitude to Reading Development, Evidence from Children, Documentary evidence from schools containing data from children, Learner Outcomes, School Improvement Priorities and Evidence from Teachers.

4.3.1 Attitude to Reading Development

School's attitudes towards reading development vary within the study as evidenced from four principals, two class teachers and two special education teachers. A positive attitude reflected by Amanda (Principal, School B) results in very positive outcomes for pupils:

> *There was a huge focus on reading in our school. We'd take great pride in the fact that the children seemed to attain very good marks in reading and that we put a huge emphasis on it* [reading] *from the day they come into the school with pre-reading, reading readiness and early intervention strategies. In junior and senior infants right up we have a large bank of reading material. We invested hugely in reading material and we don't stick to any particular reading scheme.*

While no support has been found for the notion that the differentiation between children presenting with mathematics difficulties and who were also poor readers, was related to variations in reading across the reviewed studies (Swanson et al., 2009b), however, Amanda feels that it is necessary for pupils to:

> *Learn to read really well in the lower levels of school. Then they won't have as*

> *much problem with history and geography and maths, like understanding the different maths questions. I feel that my total aim is to have them* [the pupils] *reading fluently and comprehending what they* [the pupils] *are reading at the end of second class.*

Mags (Acting Principal, School D) insists that:

> *Reading doesn't mean anything unless you can comprehend what you're reading and I think from even before school the whole area of comprehension is what we* [teachers] *are striving towards. Reading comprehension I would see it as a huge part of the literacy programme*".

This evidence reflects the advice of Meek et al (1977) who encouraged teachers to ask the question: what is reading for? Children need to know that there is a purpose for reading and explicit explanation of the text needs to take place to facilitate comprehension and understanding of what is being read.

Carrie (SET, School D) realises the importance of the development of reading comprehension within the mainstream class and reflects:

> *Reading comprehension plays a huge role and myself being in learning support, I'm really beginning to realise and look back on my years when I was in the mainstream class, and I wish I had put more emphasis on reading comprehension.*

Teaching good comprehension strategies for children who have reading difficulties was also highlighted by Mari (Class Teacher, School A) who suggests activities:

> *…such as underlining the text, reading it and re-reading it so that it's just not once that they* [the pupils] *heard it, they* [the pupils] *are hearing it a number of times during the week, talking about the text, asking question. I suppose reflecting back on the text and predicting and higher order, lower order questions trying to present the text in as many ways, contexts as possible and getting involved in conversation about different aspects of the text in order to keep their concentration and focus*.

Madge (Class Teacher, School B) advocated that continuous professional development for teachers is key to ensuring that their skills in teaching reading comprehension be continuously updated:

> *Information now it has been trickled down through into the PDST courses and we know reading comprehension is an area we* [teachers] *need to look at and I think*

> *you have to be motivated as a teacher now to find these things out keep up to date as much as we can*.

As children with SEN often hide their difficulties, Nora (Principal, School A) reflects on a situation when she as an adult learner felt how children with SEN may feel when they are struggling with literacy within a class context:

> *I was quite able at school but I remember the first computer course I went on* [as an adult learner] *and the people in the room were talking in a different language. I'd never heard these words before, they were talking about megabytes and gigabytes. I'd never heard of these things and you know RAM and all this computer terminology which is a whole set of vocabulary that I'd never heard or never been exposed to before and immediately I was that child... I was there smiling and saying nothing and behaving myself and lying low and doing all of those things and I suppose I went home that night and said to my mum. Mum, I know for the first time in my life what it's like to be in a class and everybody else knows what's going on and you haven't really a clue and yet you're content just to be there and just pretend that all is well. So I suppose it's important to teach skills such as retelling and getting them* [the pupils] *to think aloud. This helps children with SEN because often times they've learned to hide their difficulties.*

All teachers interviewed, felt that the teaching of reading comprehension skills were vital to enable children to become competent readers. This was reflected by Una (SET, School A) who emphasised that: '*reading comprehension means that children understand what they are reading so it's very important*.' John (Principal, School C) agrees and adds: '*the aspects of reading comprehension are very important as part of the literacy curriculum*.' Maureen (Principal, School E) concurs with this by asserting that '*in order for a child or any person to succeed at reading they have to be able to understand what they are reading so it is all about reading for meaning*.' Joe (Class Teacher, School E) explains the importance of the transfer of skills learned in reading comprehension lessons in English to other curricular areas: '*Reading comprehension is not just for literacy lessons, it's not just for an English lesson; children need to be able to comprehend everything that they are reading in different subjects*.' Inclusive practice was also highlighted as a factor that results in positive attitudes and enhances reading development as suggested by Teresa (SET, School C) who revealed:

> *Our school is very inclusive and we're all very much about an open door way of working. Reading in our school, is, I would say we excel at reading in the school, we have worked very hard at implementing programmes that will help the children achieve the best results that they can*.

One interpretation of the data could be to propose that if elementary reading instruction were to be transformed so that children were taught the skills and knowledge, children's comprehension and reading skills would be better (Pressley, 2000).

In light of this assertion the issue of where the school places its focus (teaching, assessment, testing and outcomes) is imperative as suggested by my findings.

Any well-founded educational intervention should be based on solid knowledge of the causes of a particular form of learning difficulty, which consequently should be based on an understanding of how a given skill is learned by children who are developing normally (Snowling and Hulme, 2011). Phonologically based interventions are useful in ameliorating children's word level decoding difficulties and interventions to advance vocabulary and broader oral language skills remediate reading and oral language comprehension difficulties.

In general therefore, it seems that if school's present a positive attitude to reading development this leads to better outcomes for children. The development of pre-reading and reading readiness programmes and early intervention strategies that result in children being able to read well and comprehend well by second class supports them in their future learning. The necessity for teachers to avail of CPD is also a factor that leads to a positive disposition.

All principals, class teachers and special education teachers interviewed, rated having a positive disposition to the enhancement of reading development a necessary factor in the development of reading in their pupils. Amanda (Principal, School B) describes the

influence that a positive disposition has: '*We take great pride in the fact that the children seemed to attain very good marks in reading*'. This notion also translates into classroom practice by Madge (Class Teacher, School B) who considers that: '*reading is something that our school takes very seriously and we take great pride in our teaching of reading*'. Mags (Acting Principal, School D) concurs with this positive attitude: '*all of the teachers are very committed to teaching the* [reading comprehension] *strategies*'.

This good inclusive practice concurs with the advice that teachers should become more familiar with the intricacies of developmentally appropriate practices (Barry, 2005). In light of this there is a great need for teachers and educators to have substantial knowledge of the strategies which are most effective for the teaching of literacy in general and especially in the area of reading comprehension as the following evidence from children supports.

4.3.2 Evidence from Children

Four schools who participated in this study (Schools B, C, D and E) also revealed evidence gleaned from their cohort of pupils in relation to their perceptions about their learning in the area of reading comprehension. In response to being asked about formally collecting evidence from pupils regarding their learning in this area Amanda (Principal, School B) confessed: '*No, not in a written way, but orally they would all absolutely love the* [reading comprehension] *strategy being implemented every year*'. Carrie (SET, School D) disclosed:

> *We did give out a questionnaire. I know the vice principal did that for the assessment, the self assessment thing. I don't know how honest the children were. I think we didn't look at the results for too long... it was just something... a box that had to be ticked*".

When asked if she had collected data in any way from the children about their own reading, Mona (Class Teacher, School D) answered: "*I haven't done that yet*". Maureen

(Principal, School E) advocated the use of self assessment by indicating:

> *I have a self assessment rubric…that I get the children to fill in themselves… what do I feel I am good at?… Have I improved at my reading?…What would I like to be better at?.. and that give the children themselves time to reflect on where they are at as well and assessments like that inform us* [teachers].

Teresa (SET, School C) suggests listening to the children's voices although this is not current practice in the area of learning support for reading comprehension in her school:

> *Even for the children with SEN, that whole idea of that they would talk even at the end of a session, that there is that chance to talk to them* [the pupils] *about how they found it* [the comprehension lesson], *what worked, what didn't work, and I think sometimes it's that whole idea of the child's voice that we don't go towards as much as we should. I think you know the children, they're so honest with us* [teachers] *you know that the majority aren't afraid to tell you what they're thinking and I think maybe we do need to place more of an emphasis on children's voices than even the teacher's voices sometimes when it comes to teaching and learning*.

This evidence suggests addressing the challenges experienced by a child with SEN in learning to read, as the child tends to struggle with the actual process of deciphering print and as a result actually misses out on the interpretation of meaning (Ott, 1997).

Jane (Class Teacher, School C) affirms:

> *…how important it is to actually do questionnaires yearly, sometimes in the classroom about different things because we assume that children know skills and the reality is that they don't know them. We did a questionnaire about reading and how often they do reading. What would they do if they found a story too difficult to read and what did they do if they don't understand a word? A lot of them would say if they didn't understand it that they just leave the book down and a lot of them said that they'd ask somebody. They said if they didn't know a word they would just skip it or they would just use the sentence to try and figure out what the word might mean; the context of the sentence. The results were very different so that was very interesting, so it kind of showed me well if I'm doing something in any subject again, I'd nearly try and do a quick questionnaire, to suss out where the children are at because I think a lot of the time we assume that children know things and they don't and how would they?*

Metacognitive strategies identify the different ways in which we learn (Hackett and Ní Bhroin, 2012). Of all who participated in the study none of the teachers recognised metacognitive strategies as being important for children. Only one, Mona (Class Teacher,

School D) incorporated this: '*they* [pupils] *have their own self evaluation notebook*', so that the children could assess their own improvement in a particular area of the curriculum.

It is therefore a possible hypothesis that it is necessary to collect evidence from children about how they experience their own learning, recognition of their metacognitive strategies and the ways in which they learn best. This is also supported by formally collecting data and evidence from children by way of the school self evaluation process described below.

4.3.3 Documentary evidence from schools containing data from children

I am presenting this data qualitatively. The cohort of schools involved in my project provided me with this data in a variety of ways: school self-evaluation reports and plans and results of questionnaires and surveys that children had completed. I extracted the key findings in relation to what the children said and identified areas where improvement is needed as highlighted by the schools in their School Improvement Plans (SIP). Where percentages are cited in the Learner Outcomes below these percentages are aggregated from all the schools.

4.3.4 Learner Outcomes

All of the data within this section was analysed using a content analysis as identified in the methodology and the results are drawn from questionnaires that were conducted as part of School Self Evaluation (SSE). The results of these questionnaires revealed that across all classes most pupils had a positive attitude toward reading. Children reported that they felt concentration and practice were the two most important components in making a good reader. Percentages were drawn from the questionnaires undertaken as part of the school's own evaluation and I based my analysis on the school-based reports. 83% of children reported that they did not use questioning as a strategy in helping to understand reading with over 90% of children reporting that they used determining importance as a strategy to

better understand their reading with identifying the main ideas as the second most used strategy. 30% of children used predictions, 90% used visualisations, 49% made connections and 32% used contextual cues. When questioned regarding what children do when they find a story difficult to understand, 50% responded that they give up, 21% asked someone to explain, 8% used strategies, 8% try to keep reading without fully understanding, while 8% re-attempt at a different time.

4.3.5 School Improvement Priorities

The following areas were prioritised by teachers across all five schools as areas for improvement:

- Engaging in explicit teaching of comprehension strategies on a whole school basis over a specified period of time and using comprehension programmes and resources to implement this
- Availing of staff CPD based on comprehension and sourcing relevant books and resources suitable for teaching comprehension strategies
- Prioritising whole school planning development for comprehension
- Highlighting relevance, meaning and purpose of comprehension to all pupils in the context of home and school contexts

All of the above evidence highlights the need for a broad and balanced programme for the teaching of reading comprehension in schools.

4.3.6 Evidence from Teachers

Regarding the collation of evidence from teachers pertaining to reflecting on their own practice two principals and two class teachers commented. Mags (Acting Principal, School D) contended:

> *Yes, the teachers filled in the forms, I collated them all, and done over two years for reading and comprehension, I then drew up a plan, but that's where it* [the plan] *lay*.

Madge (Class Teacher, School B) disclosed:

> *As part of the school self-evaluation we picked reading comprehension as an area we knew we had to work on. When you analysed the Drumcondra Reading Tests at the end of the year it became apparent that comprehension was an area (even though we thought that we were teaching it fairly well) that was coming up was lower than we would have liked it to be*.

Mona (Class Teacher, School D) identified the need for whole school collaboration:

> *She* [the principal] *would send around questionnaires and everything saying what do you need, and she'd be very hands-on like that, but there's no whole school togetherness on it. So there would be need for a whole school plan, a whole school approach... there would be yes, that is missing yes*.

Nora (Principal, School A) prioritised oral language for their school SSE:

> *We found that oral language in our school wasn't where we wanted it to be either, so we said we would focus first on oral language because we said that was the bedrock of everything and that's why we chose to go with it first*.

According to this data, the importance of school planning to identify where the gaps in learning exist is highlighted and it is therefore necessary that development plans compiled as a result of the SSE process must be adopted as school policy and implemented otherwise they are worthless.

Prioritising one area for development helps schools to better focus on elementary reading instruction that emphasises the teaching of skills and knowledge and results in improvement in children's comprehension and reading skills. (Pressley, 2000). In light of this assertion the issue of where the school places its focus, whether it is on teaching, assessment, testing and outcomes is important as well as ascertaining how effectiveness of strategy implementation and the strategy itself is monitored and evaluated in schools.

4.4 Practices

The practices outlined in this section emerged from the data based upon what the participants reported that they do to support learners. Practices involves the organisation, administration and planning for SEN delivery. Practices in this context are considered as the actual application or use of ideas, methods, procedures, beliefs, or procedures currently used by my participants as opposed to theories relating to it. A major objective of this study was to identify current practice in the teaching of reading comprehension for children with SEN in mainstream schools. Although many and varied classroom practices were identified in the study nonetheless many gaps in provision were also identified.

The following data is representative of three principals, four mainstream class teachers and three special education teachers and one parent and the quotes were chosen because they are exemplary of practice in relation to the following: assessment, the identification of reading difficulties, classroom practices, differentiation of the curriculum to support children with SEN, learning support provision, one-to-one withdrawal, team teaching, additional supports, and provision for special educational needs (co-morbid conditions), self-esteem, teacher preparation and record keeping.

4.4.1 Assessment

Assessment Tests

Formative and Summative assessment was outlined as a necessary practice in schools:

> *Well they're monitored by the teacher first of all in the classroom situation and then in little reading tests that we might give throughout the year you know and usually we give one at Christmas and one at Easter and Summer time and that would evaluate where they are, like, can they see that there's more to a particular story than gleaning information and then obviously at the end of the year, the standardised tests at the end of the year do test the comprehension*. (Amanda, Principal, School B).

Amanda also administers assessment prior to embarking on reading initiatives:

> *We test the children first and we see what level each child is at and then we group them into groups, not necessarily class groups, you know ability groups, so that works really well and we do station teaching for the six weeks*'.

Betty (Parent, School A) contends that the results of standardised test often depends on a child's performance on the day and are therefore not indicative of ability and are unreliable:

> *But you know sometimes to be quite honest, you're better off not knowing some of those things* [test results], *because I think you get paranoid you know and then I feel especially with my son on the day, he could perform brilliantly one day and the next day and it depends on what's written on that test, what's grasped his attention, who he's sitting beside.*

Carrie (SET, School D) advocates the use of the following assessment tests in her SEN setting: '*we use the Jackson phonic test , ticking off the Dolch Sight, we have the Neale Analysis, the Young Reading Comprehension, the Schonnel, the Single Word Reading Test*.'

Mona (Class Teacher, School D) affirms the practice of each child being assessed at their own level: '*I use the Swist and each child is being assessed at their own reading level*.'

Nora (Principal, School A) encourages the use of the Micra T assessment test:

> *I think the older they get you know the more of a reflection it is on their level of comprehension. This is identified in the Micra T results because there's more comprehension needed at an older level than there is at we'll say word identification level at the younger age group*.

In relation to planning for oral language development, receptive grammatical skills, exposure to print and verbal learning and retrieval all make significant contributions to reading comprehension with the language and the word reading variables having a greater relation with reading comprehension than the memory variables (Goff et al., 2005). Previous exposure to irregular words is imperative when words are presented in linear form rather than as part of a sentence since contextual factors cannot be used to facilitate

reading and phonological decoding alone will be unlikely to produce the correct word. Correct reading therefore relies on whether the words have been encountered previously either in an aural or written format. Nora related that her school also uses the '*British vocabulary picture test to give us a baseline for vocabulary and oral language assessment and oral language checklists and also the NRIT*.' Nora also comprehensively describes assessment practices in her school:

> *First of all they're identified through teacher observation and then through talking to your colleagues. Maybe teachers who may have taught them in the past and seen how they felt about how the child is progressing. Children are screened from a very early age in the school. We do the MIST test in senior infants and we've recently introduced the Belfield, the BIAP test for children in junior infants. We have collaboration between the SET and the class teacher. Then we would discuss it with them if we felt we needed to get children, screened and tested and we'd have that school intervention. Maybe the SET would come on board whether in-class or withdrawal and then if a child is still not progressing or there is still difficulty we might then access out of school supports. I suppose at the third stage of the learning support process, we would have the children assessed and we would get a clearer picture from a psychologist to see where we're going.*

The concept of assessment for leaning (AfL) as well as assessment of learning was also proposed by Maureen (Principal, School E):

> *The assessments that the children have done would inform the strategies and the programmes that would be used in each classroom. We don't have the same programmes going through the school. We have different programmes in each classroom depending on the needs, ability and the results of the assessments of each grouping. Each individual class teacher meets the SET on a weekly basis for a formal meeting but again it's discussed daily and the assessment tests are analysed. Any tests that are done in the classroom are analysed and monitored and they are discussed and they are re-assessed or re-configured should needs be.*

For assessment purposes Maureen recommends the use of diagnostic tests:

> *At an individual level if a child has comprehension difficulties, the special needs teacher will administer diagnostic tests. I know that she used the Neale analysis and the DRA the Diagnostic Reading Test and this will pinpoint exactly where the child is struggling or having difficulties or where the needs of the child are. Then of course we have the annual tests; the Drumcondra the standardised test.*

This translates and dovetails with classroom practice in School E as described by Joe (Class Teacher):

> *You have your assessment for learning and assessment of learning. On a whole class basis, you could see there was problems and a lot of pupils didn't get this, so we* [teachers] *were doing something wrong and we had to change our style. If it was a child or two children that just didn't understand it, then we'd differentiate the work to suit their needs and abilities. Teaching is difficult without assessment because you need to know what's working. There's no point in teaching for the whole year and having one assessment at the end of the year and finding out that half the class didn't understand what you were on about. The one to one reading that we did with everyone, which in itself is an assessment, to see how they* [pupils] *were getting on. Teaching should be the other way around, you teach to assess, but it's not in reality, it's not, you assess to teach, you assess to know what you're going to teach, what you are doing right, and you have to change it if it's not right.'*

Sheila (SET, School E) describes how this also translates to the SET context: '*we evaluate using tests as a diagnostic tool, it informs the next half terms planning.'*

Commonly used tests of reading comprehension may not utilise the same range of cognitive processes therefore special educators and psychologists may need to use multiple reading comprehension measures to determine eligibility for special educational services and for planning interventions (Cutting and Scarborough, 2006). Intercorrelations among some tests suggest that they measure different skills (Keenan et al., 2008). There are serious implications for schools to consider in light of the fact that different reading comprehension tests measure different skills, and that sometimes even the same test measures different skills depending on the age and ability of the pupil being tested. Teresa (SET, School C) warns of the need for correct interpretation of test scores and identifies other necessary assessment strategies as well in order that teachers should fine-tune their teaching to suit the pupil's needs:

> *It has to be very much observational based. At the end of year assessment, you'll get your comprehension score but it really doesn't tell you too much. So if a child has a standard score of one hundred and thirty they are probably using a huge amount of their comprehension strategies, but at the same time it doesn't give a clear insight as to whether they can definitely predict or visualise or determine importance. I think something like even a rubric or coding, even having a sheet with all the children's names and the different strategies you're working on and that you have a different symbol for each of the strategies. It's really about getting a baseline for them and once you know where a particular child is at then you're better equipped to meet their needs because you can build on what they know.*

> *Assessment involves identifying the areas of need. Maybe we can do tests and we have our scores in a folder but they're no good to us. It's only just a number. We need to look into it closer as to why a child has got that number.*

Assessing prior to programme implementation was advised by Jane (Class Teacher, School C): '*we always test the children prior to setting up reading groups*.' Lorna (SET, School B) advises the use of '*informal and teacher designed tests'*. Madge also promotes informal assessment: '*we* [teachers] *are informally assessing all the time, teacher observation and everything.'* Mags (Acting Principal, School D) uses '*Drumcondra Tests and the MIST Tests*'. Madge (Class Teacher, School B) counsels the practice of continuous assessment:

> *Doing formal assessment at the end of the year where you may have your own teacher designed tasks and tests that you might implement during the year. You're constantly assessing whether they* [pupils] *know it or you don't. We would keep individual folders or portfolios for each child and we would keep samples of their work. So in September I would normally get them to do a piece of free writing for me and put that in their folder and then after Christmas again and put that all in. I put something in nearly every subject that I can and that gives a lovely snapshot as to how the children are doing.*

The results of the analysis revealed that schools used a number of approaches for assessing the children's learning in order to support practice, whilst these tests varied between the schools all did see the strength of such assessments when informing their work. It must be cautioned that the relationship between RAN components and reading ability is dependent on age as well as on reading level considering that the process(es) indexed by the RAN inter-item pause time constitute the main source of naming difficulties in dyslexia, whereas the articulation times was unrelated to measures of reading (Araújo et al., 2011). Tests that measure the rapid naming of objects and tests that examine final-sound discrimination in phonological awareness conclude that both rapid automatic naming and phonological awareness predicted reading in the English language throughout the early school years and that consideration of these variables in the early years were more useful as a diagnostic measure than measures at more advanced ages (Cronin, 2011).

The simple view of reading (Hoover and Gough, 1990) is a model that espouses adopting a holistic approach which recognises the critical approach to teaching comprehension, because reading comprehension is influenced by decoding and listening comprehension. It claims that although word reading and language comprehension are largely independent sets of skills, both, however, are absolutely necessary for reading and for the deciphering of text comprehension. The skills of word reading ability, vocabulary knowledge, syntactic skills, memory, and discourse level skills such as the ability to make inferences, knowledge about text structure, and metacognitive skills all contribute to sound reading comprehension. The growth of these skills (or their precursors) in children at the pre-reading stage, provides the basis for the development of reading comprehension. The role of strategies, fluency, illustrations and second language in reading comprehension (Kirby and Savage, 2008) need to be addressed further. Thus, my findings will be used as a basis to propose instructional programme development (in terms of both curriculum and teacher education) and develop evidence based approaches that have the potential to optimise literacy performance for all children.

This highlights the fact that if a teacher wants to help a pupil to improve their reading, then the focus of assessments and instructional interventions must be on either or both of these elements (Svensson, 2008) and this in turn will assist schools with the early identification of reading difficulties.

4.4.2 Identification of Reading Difficulties

All of the parents, one special education teacher and one class teacher interviewed identified the early identification of difficulties to be of paramount importance. In her case this did not occur for her child until they decided to move her to a different school when they realised that her difficulties were not being addressed in her original school:

> *When she moved to the school she's now in, they picked up on it very quickly and she was seen by the Educational Psychologist very quickly and she was declared as moderately to severely dyslexic*. (Mary, Parent, School C)

In one instance, a parent, Lyn (School E) described how her son did not receive a diagnosis until he was thirteen:

> *The Paediatrician involved said to me well how come he's thirteen and he hasn't been diagnosed and I'm kind of saying 'look at the records' ... I've been trying to do it* [obtain a diagnosis] *for the last seven years.*

Regarding the issue of school's not identifying difficulties in the early years one parent perceived that:

> *It's kind of still a bit of stigma if your child has a bit of learning disability, you know, and maybe that's why they* [the school] *don't want to bring people in, that's just my opinion*.

Orla (Parent, School D) regrets that her child did not receive a diagnosis of dyslexia until he was nine years and now she finds reassurance in the fact that:

> *He now has a name for it* [dyslexia], *he says: "it's not me, it's not that I'm silly or stupid or thick, there's a reason for it", and this is a huge relief to the child*.'

Limited financial resources are a drawback to schools in that they can only get a certain numbers of assessments completed by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) each year. This leads to the practice of the children who present with the greater degree of need being prioritised for assessments. Orla alluded to this in her statement about requesting that her child be assessed:

> *There's a certain amount of assessments that they* [the school] *are allotted, I think, and so they have to prioritise... but what about the other kids? You really have to push yourself forward as far as I can see and say my child needs to be assessed and please do it. There's a huge need for assessments and there doesn't seem to be the resources for it*.

Madge (Class Teacher, School B) describes the challenge that modern family life presents and how this has implications for the school environment:

> *I think a lot of children nowadays don't have as much vocabulary as we maybe would expect and I think that if parents are busy working they might not have much time nowadays to talk to their children than they did in times past. So as a result they're coming into school maybe with not as much vocabulary under their belt, than they might have had years ago. So I think it's important as teachers that we realise that and we try and tackle that as best as we can.*

One parent, Betty (Parent, School A) indicated how it was she who observed that her child was having difficulties:

> *I have another daughter who has dyslexia, so I was aware when James started senior infants work like blending sounds that he was struggling a little, so I approached the teacher first and said do you think he has difficulties? Then she said we'll keep an eye on things and then after that she said yes there's definitely something wrong there.*

As a result of her experiences Betty offers the following advice to parents:

> *If they* [children] *are having difficulty, as soon as you even suspect that they might be, go straight to the school, don't be sitting waiting and thinking, ah sure my fellow can't read, because there's no excuse. There's help out there and everyone can be taught how read you know, and it's just a matter of taking the time, staying calm, putting the work in, and it will pay dividends in the end*.'

Intervention at the earliest possible stage can only be implemented with prior pre-school knowledge about the child being ascertained pre-enrolment according to Teresa (SET, School C):

> *In the early years, before children would even start school, on their enrolment form we would ascertain if a child had been attending speech and language, if they had a diagnosis or any particular special education need. So if that has been identified then we would use that to support them as soon as they came in. Besides, from that, both the class teacher and support teacher would be very much keeping a look out and will often be the one to maybe identify that there is a problem. Then we would talk to the parents or sometimes you would have parents that will come to you with a concern and then we'd take it from there*.'

These findings suggest that early identification of reading difficulties is paramount to early intervention being implemented as this will impact comprehension considering that the gathering of meaning from the printed page is the purpose of reading and as an active process it requires intentional and thoughtful interaction between the reader and the text

(Lerner, 2006). It is therefore relevant that this concept is at the core of any reading programme. In a school context the reader endeavours to bridge the gap that exists between what they are reading and the knowledge which they already possess in order to make sense of it. My research concedes that the comprehension of reading depends on what the reader brings to the written material by way of experience, knowledge of language and recognition of syntactic structure (Lerner, 2006). Thus reading comprehension is a thinking process which is akin to problem solving and requires a pupil to actively interact with the text. For this to occur for a child with SEN, reading difficulties should be identified early in order that supports and strategies can be put in place that will inform classroom practice.

4.4.3 Classroom Practice

Within the context of my research I identified how school's developed their classroom practice within the inclusive setting according to evidence provided from three principals, two class teachers and two special education teachers. Classroom practice was developed in School E according to Sheila (SET) by reflecting on the needs of their cohort of children:

> *We did a lot of thinking about our literacy, how it wasn't meeting the needs of our children particularly as such a large cohort of children had special needs. So we decided we needed to change our teaching of reading. We did an oral language course; a summer school course and we found out that our literacy didn't meet the needs of our children so we changed it*.

Best practices in methodologies have been identified as positive contributing factors conducive to the development of comprehension skills. Amanda (Principal, School B) reported:

> *We do the intensive six weeks of Literacy Lift-Off, the children enjoy it so much, they absolutely hate when that six weeks is over and they want to keep going on. The better children are challenged more than would be the norm and the weaker children are finding a lot of success as part of the group. We test before it and we test them after it and inevitably they go up a good few levels in their comprehension*.

The meaning – emphasis approach to the teaching of reading is advocated by research and this was supported by a SET who revealed:

> *I think the strategies, explicitly teaching them really helps because it's taking away the pressure from the decoding. I really do think it's changed the focus for children particularly. You're not teaching the mechanics* [of reading] *anymore, that really it's just about reading, answering the questions and there's not an engagement with the text. I think that now by putting the focus on that you're kind of engaging them, you're making it more about effective reading as opposed to reading to just answer questions... and a lot of those questions were quite literal anyway, so its more purposeful now'* (Lorna, SET, School B).

This concurs with the advice of Meek et al. (1977) who encouraged teachers to reflect on the purpose of reading.

Maureen (Principal, School E) concedes that:

> *With the classroom practice, I'm not the only person who meets the SEN team. Each individual class teacher meets the special needs teacher on a weekly basis for a formal meeting but again it's discussed daily and the assessment tests are analysed. Any tests that are done in the classroom are analysed and monitored and they are discussed and the children are re-assessed and teaching configured as the needs require, especially for the children in the classroom with IEPs. There would be regular meetings with regard to their needs, not just comprehension skills but everything. The other short term achievable targets that they have would be discussed regularly and the assessments are analysed by class teacher and SET teacher.*

Mari (Class Teacher, School A) revealed that time constraints proposed a big challenge to teachers in delivering reading comprehension skills for children with SEN:

> *In the context of the time you would have to spend with SEN children in a classroom of thirty or more on reading comprehension, the reality is, I probably wouldn't have a huge amount of time to do it with them.*

Nora (Principal, School A) perceives that curriculum overload and teachers feeling overwhelmed by content is a mitigating factor and not conducive to inclusion of children with SEN in the mainstream class: There are issues around curriculum overload and this might have an impact on all children including children with SEN:

> *So I think when the curriculum was revised at the start of 1999/2000 we were all*

> *brought out for these training days and I think everything was thrown at us over a period of a few years and I don't think we ever really fully understood it. I think I'm only coming to grasp with the revised curriculum really now in the last four to five years. So I think we're all still learning and while I'm teaching twenty years, you know things have changed and you know things have changed a lot for the children and demography has changed and there's a lot of challenges out there*.

Nora also associates work overload and poor performance:

> *It's all about timing and it's about being able to reflect and often times there's too many initiatives thrown at us in schools. We're often chasing our tails. I think let's go back to the school self-evaluation. I think it's worthwhile and I see the need for it and I think it's very important, but this thing of having one plan begun and suddenly rushing into collecting data and collecting evidence to begin your next plan. I think it's too much, I do think the Department* [Department of Education and Skills] *should allow us two years to have one plan successfully in place and really give us real time while we reflect*.

Despite class teachers facing many daily challenges, these results portray that best classroom practice reflects differentiated teaching methodologies suited to the needs of the individual children, encompassing components of the simple view, the skills-based approach and the meaning emphasis approaches to reading. The compilation of an Individual Education Plan (IEP), efficient time-tabling and training in approaches to teaching reading for children with SEN are all pre-requisites for successful teaching. Proficiency in phonological processing is not the main determinant of reading acquisition as my research suggests and while the measurement of reading in terms of phonological awareness is quantifiable, comprehension however, and the range of skills which support it, is much more difficult to measure (Bishop and Adams,1990). This difficulty in measuring the range of skills that support comprehension highlights that while school's may subscribe to the importance of comprehension as well as decoding, the lack of clarity is further aggravated by the tension between the meaning-emphasis based proponents versus the subscribers to the knowledge and skills based approach, i.e. the top down versus bottom up approaches to the teaching of reading. The 'simple view' of reading is presented as a model in which reading and comprehension is a function of the interaction between the ability to decode words and language comprehension. In assessing the models of

reading and their place in a reading instruction programme school's must be aware that many divergent approaches may be necessary in order to facilitate the differing needs of pupils and no one single approach may provide all the answers which encompasses the notion of differentiation as evidenced in my study.

4.4.4 Differentiation

One principal, one parent, one special education teacher and two class teachers agreed with the concept of inclusion proposed by King (2006) that systemic change is necessary and advocating that school's should embrace changing their curriculum and teaching to suit the needs of the child rather than the other way around by trying to make the child 'fit in'. Mary (Parent, School C) reported:

> *In the other school, they were trying to make her fit in with the curriculum, and then when she got the diagnosis of dyslexia, they tailored it* [the curriculum] *to meet her needs.*

Amanda (Principal, School B) recognised the importance of differentiation of the curriculum for children with SEN:

> *We test the children first and we see what level each child is at and then we group them into groups, not necessarily class groups, you know ability groups, so that works really well and we do station teaching for the six week. Our policy for English would of course include children with special education needs. Children with special education needs would be totally provided for, because they would always be working at their ability level*.

Amanda also describes how she differentiates within the multi-class context:

> *Well we have four classes in each classroom, so it has to be very focused on each class grouping. Even if say for instance, I read a story to junior infants to second class, the focus of comprehension would be different for each group. I would have made out questions in advance – you know. Obviously, the junior infants would be doing the more literal questions and then the senior end being first and second would be doing more inferential and that sort of questioning*.

Amanda then further describes how this intervention identifies children who have difficulties:

> *Then you know some children will grasp it quicker than others and very early on you can spot children who are going to have a little bit of a problem with it and then we'd maybe put a little bit of extra effort into those children even in junior infants to bring them on with the rest of the group and maybe you know speak to the parents and get them involved as well.*

Amanda recommends children reading at levels according to ability and not exclusively using a 'one size fits all' reading scheme: '*we give a lot of exposure to different reading schemes and at different levels or the same levels, children generally read at their own level once they go to senior infants.*' Amanda identifies the element of the pace of the lesson as being an important factor in differentiation:

> *We'd use the instruction we use for everybody, but just at a different pace to bring it down to smaller little parts of each lesson. It would be just differentiated for the special education needs children. We don't have much withdrawal of individual children, we mostly withdraw children as part of a group so that and the differentiation would be part of that group work.*

She adds:

> *We don't differentiate hugely in terms of labelling or anything like that.*

Amanda defined how inclusive practice was supported in her school context:

> *Inclusion is supported in terms of differentiation of what your teaching and the ability of the teacher to see and to assess first of all what level the children are at and then to teach to that level.*

She also advises:

> *Differentiation and teaching to the children's ability and raising the bar as much as you can for them and having good expectations is, I think hugely important and also expecting them to do their best and then they deliver to you*.

This practice transfers to the classroom in her school with Madge (Class Teacher) acknowledging: '*that's where I'll put the differentiation into place, so either by grouping or by pace, so they* [SEN children] *are learning the skills just the same as everybody else.'*

Mari (Class Teacher, School A) assumes her role is:

> *To be reading the text to try and be as clear with the text as possible so that it gives the best opportunities to understand the text I suppose. Then I present the questions and listen to feedback. I would try and work on the comprehension more so with smaller groups, if I was differentiating, then it is the smaller groups that would need more help.*

Mari describes her teaching methodology in a reading comprehension lesson:

> *We'd read through the text and we'd scan the text and underline words, look at the pictures, discuss the pictures, sometimes we'll go through the questions before hand to try and focus on the high achievers who'll often be just really wanting to let you know that they understand everything. I think it's important to spend that little bit more time with the weaker children as they may need the extra bit of scaffolding just to get there. I go through the words in a little bit more detail with them if possible.*

Sheila (SET, School E) in describing her practice implies:

> *I think it's the way you differentiate, again it's the way you introduce new things at a rate that's good for them and to recognise the fact that some children see things in a different way to others, like in chunking up information; some children just get totally lost. So you give them the ruler and you say just use your ruler as a guide. Some children might like a blank piece of paper because again there's too much information in the text and they get over whelmed. I think you have to know your children and you have to know when to introduce something at the right level, at the right time, so you don't over whelm them and I think that is an important thing to do.*

These observations support that the concept of differentiating the curriculum for children with reading difficulties is key to inclusive practice and the realisation that there is no one single approach to the teaching of reading for these children (Flynn and Stainthorp, 2006). This further compounds the problems that children with SEN may experience as evidenced by the schools. A major issue for schools are the challenges experienced by a child with SEN in learning to read. As these children are often taught within an inclusive setting, the challenges which they present with, in the development of reading comprehension acquisition are addressed by differentiation of the curriculum which is critical in the provision of a balanced reading programme for such children. This differentiation often occurs through the provision of learning support.

4.4.5 Learning Support Provision

Insights on learning support provision were gathered from one principal, one acting principal, two special education teachers and two parents who revealed learning support provision varied among the participating schools. Lorna (SET, School B) outlined provision in her school in this way:

> *The learning support we would do is in early intervention. We would begin reading with junior and senior infants using the PM Books and then in the senior end of the school they would do a lot of text books but generally again individualised reading as well based on the level they are at. I think the fact that it's already differentiated allows for inclusion. We were working on the strategies of the retelling and prediction but at the level of the book that they understood and were able for. We would adapt the programme accordingly using age appropriate material.*

Betty (Parent, School A) identified her child receiving extra homework from learning support provision as a challenge in the home context:

> *There's no easy way around it, you're talking probably now forty-five minutes homework give or take and then he could have maybe fifteen minutes extra if he goes to learning support and he has work from that as well.*

However, Barbara also conceded that this practice although time consuming had dividends:

> *When he went home from school she* [SET] *would have written questions in his copy, so it would make him go back to either re-read the story if he wasn't sure if he had retained that information from reading it earlier in the day. He would go back and read it again with me and then write down the answers to all these questions, so it was making him re-think rather than just reading a book every night.*

Whole school collaboration was identified as one of the factors that is conducive to sound learning support provision. Mags (Acting Principal, School D) surmises that:

> *As a whole staff we haven't done an overview of how well or otherwise learning support is being used. When all of those results are collated by the SET then the SET team get together and look at them and decide who's falling down, or who needs intervention. Whereas at the end of the year, it tends to say, I'm finished there and my job is done, right, so that's the assessment and testing right, and the learning outcomes, it's kind of tied into that, but as I say we talked about doing it, changing the testing to September, but I don't think anybody will, I don't think that will happen, so our focus is certainly positive towards the teaching, but what's happening I think is that we're all teaching in our own environment, and that whole picture, big picture is missing and there isn't enough discussion.*

John (Principal, School C) disclosed:

> *We have a learning support team and resources based on reading comprehension. Children are broken up into specific groups for these reading comprehension exercises. Children are working at levels appropriate to their ability.*

Sheila (SET, School E) proposed that the:

> *Learning support role could be to take some of the vocabulary from a topic and try to teach the vocabulary; pre-teach it, so when they* [pupils] *came to it at least they will have some prior knowledge of it and they will be able to keep up with the rest of the class. Even so, they're going to have to be differentiated in the classroom because of the amount they are going to have to read in history, in geography, in science. History and geography in particular is very much wordy and for the children with difficulties, it's going to be a huge issue. So I think pre-teaching and differentiation is the key.'*

Lyn (Parent, School E) commends the way the support for reading is structured in her child's school:

> *There are a group of children and they're actually continuing to sit in the classroom as a group, so it's just like me and my friends, we have a group for reading and another group then would be for maths, so the school has kind of disguised it into little group situations... So he wouldn't feel that he is different than anybody else*.

Teresa (SET, School C) encourages regular consolidation and review of learning support provision:

> *I think sometimes maybe, we teach a strategy and we expect them* [the children] *to use it. I suppose you should recap you know, make sure to consolidate what has been taught and then start afresh in with new material.*

The evidence indicates that the teaching of reading is a complex process and that teachers in schools are teaching different skills which would feed into that complex process. This learning process requires the interaction of a number of skills such as visual discrimination, visual and auditory memory, language, phonological skills and knowledge of rhyme (Westwood, 2003).Learning support provision should include these components in a reading programme that could be offered in the one-to-one withdrawal context.

4.4.6 One to One Withdrawal

Four of the SET's interviewed, along with on acting principal and one class teacher ascertained that the practice of withdrawal was still necessary for some children. Carrie (SET, School D) explained:

> *When I withdraw children as well, a lot of my work is on reading comprehension and vocabulary development and I find the books from Building Bridges of Understanding really good for that.*

She also discusses the importance of transfer of skills from learning support to classroom contexts:

> *If we* [SETs] *give them skills that they will be able to when they're back in the classroom to work independently and be able to keep up with the rest of the class we are giving them the tools to help them comprehend what they're reading and they'll be able to keep up with the class work.*

Lorna (SET, School B) describes her learning support and early intervention practice as follows: '*the learning support we would do is in early intervention, when we would begin reading as well with junior and senior infants using the PM Books and then in the senior end they would do a lot of text books but generally again individualised reading as well based on the level they are at.*' Mags (Acting Principal, School D) also describes the early intervention practice in her school:

> *We have early intervention. Every morning in junior infants and senior infant's classes the SET goes in to hear the reading and to hear the word boxes, the Jolly Phonics'.*

Supporting the class teacher in the station teaching setting was another role identified for the SET.

> *We would focus on in the teacher directed stations on retelling so they have done the familiar readings, so retelling that the next day, and on answering questions, to make sure the questions were literal, evaluative and inferential. Then there was another group, where they were looking at the new reading material. So you would be working on the prediction, the vocabulary and preparing for the new reading. The role of the SET was to organise this and with the children in particular who I was working with I would have done a lot of work with them in the one to one sessions on reading comprehension on an individual level.* (Lorna, SET, School B)

The role of the SET in the teaching of reading comprehension in the withdrawal setting was outlined by (Lorna, SET, School B):

> *I would definitely have used the strategies* [comprehension] *with them but probably had to model an awful lot more for them. The fact that when it's a one to one, I suppose it does give them a chance to experiment in a safe environment. They can try prediction and try making connections. They're getting that much more opportunity than in a class where they are waiting for their one turn of one of twenty.*

Lorna also outlines her SET role in her school as:

> *It's making sure that the reading material is appropriate. The teacher might be doing the strategy based on the class text but sometimes the text needs to be adapted. Then you are using that strategy but on material that they're able for. Depending on the special education needs, the first thing would be to help to develop their vocabulary, I would have seen that as really a big problem for the children who I was working with particularly, they just didn't have the vocabulary, so that is the first starting point and then, the* [reading comprehension] *strategies. You may have to scaffold further for some children*.

Teresa (SET, School C) explains how she teaches comprehension strategies:

> *Modelling and teaching of the strategy and then applying it. It seems to be working very well because it really breaks the whole comprehension issue down into the small steps that for some of us, we take for granted, but for some children they really need to explicitly see where it would lead to*.

Teresa added:

> *I just felt that sometimes they don't really realise they are using a strategy, but then when they realise they were doing it, they were quite pleased with themselves. So what I started to get my groups doing then was, that, as they read a text, they coded, so they may have put V if they were visualising, P for predicting, C for connecting, so as they read something themselves, they coded and they actually got great enjoyment of it, even switching over and seeing what somebody else coded, what they were thinking at that point, it was just a nice way of working that they enjoyed as well.*

Sheila (SET, School E) explains that one to one withdrawal teaching is conducive to the consolidation of skills:

> *I also withdraw children that I support in the classrooms for one to one individual withdrawal sessions. So whatever skills they have had difficulty with in the*

> *classroom, then I can hone in on those and give them extra consolidation and that's what they need specifically these children. We've never had such large cohort of children who had such significant literacy skills difficulties and they needed to be taught the skills, not just of reading, but reading for meaning and that's why team teaching in that situation is not enough as I can see that they are struggling in the classroom and then I give them extra consolidation in the withdrawal session*.

Joe (Class Teacher, School E) discovered that one to one withdrawal is not positively favoured by some pupils:

> *The team teaching model that's in place; inclusion is a huge part of it. So I know there can be a little bit of stigma attached to a child being withdrawn all the time. They don't generally like to be taken out of their class at times so with the team teaching model you're keeping children in the class in small groups; children aren't being withdrawn. Some children are sensitive about it* [being withdrawn] *so using social stories and different things like that to talk about inclusion makes it more acceptable.*

Hence, it could conceivably be hypothesised that children should be enabled to transfer skills learned in the one-to one withdrawal situation back into the classroom context. Modelling and demonstrating effective strategies for processing text increases children's reading comprehension skills (Westwood, 2003). In light of this, strategies which elicit self-questioning, monitoring of the text and construction of graphic organisers are all worthwhile. Language development, visualising, sequencing, reading rate, vocabulary development, strategy training, background knowledge to understand text and procedures for monitoring and repairing comprehension are necessary components to include in a literacy programme (King, 2006; Swanson and Hoskyn, 1998). These aforementioned components would facilitate the implementation of the Irish Primary School Curriculum (1999) which advocates that pupils acquire an appreciation of the conventions of text, knowledge of the terminology and conventions of books and the ability to use a range of reading and comprehension skills. Types of learning support offered that facilitate this ability to transfer are early intervention, the practice of station teaching, modelling comprehension strategies, and the practice of team teaching.

4.4.7 Team Teaching

Three of the schools related that team teaching was a practice that they embraced to support inclusive practice and many and varied models of this were described:

> *We engage in team teaching and at the moment I'm with third and half of fourth class. So I would go in to each of those classes at least one hour a week and usually for that hour, we do station teaching and one of the stations would be using the programme Building Bridges of Understanding. So we would pick a different story and work on whatever strategy is being taught for that term and the organisation of it.* (Carrie, SET, School D)

Sheila (SET, School E) describes their school's team teaching endeavours which consists of a:

> *…literacy hour which would be spelling, sentences, shared reading for twenty minutes every day and the reading zone comprehension. We found out it has worked, we evaluated as we've gone along and used our test results and we've seen a marked improvement in children's literacy scores and their reading ages have improved*.'

Her rationale for embarking on team teaching in her school was founded on the reality that high numbers of their pupils presented with SEN:

> *I have to support those* [SEN] *children in the classroom and that's my main focus. Then they had confidence to attack unseen text and I think that's a major boost for me and them, that when unseen text came, they had skills, they knew what to do; even just on underlining, using the question words, where to find information in the text, so they could read on and say that matched up with that. So that was just a simple thing, but it's what I taught them. We did practice and drill on that, so that when they came to unseen text, they kind of went into that mode, so that kind of gave them skills that they could attack an unseen text and then use those skills to kind of figure it out.*

Joe (Class Teacher, School E) describes their team teaching model for literacy involving a SET and a class teacher:

> *The class was split into two groups based on needs and it was rotated in different ways as well. So it would all be based on tests that we have done; assessment for learning tests. The two teachers would rotate the different groups. Some groups would be working on computer and literacy games, some would be doing reading, and some would be doing different comprehensions. The main class reading their own comprehension and answering questions were senior infants, or the more able one or two pupils in junior infants. The teachers would be reading out the*

comprehension and the questions would be oral rather than them writing out the answers.

Jane (Class Teacher, School C) adds in relation to supporting NQT's in SEN:

> *If we had a newly qualified teacher you would work with that teacher and you would help and guide them through their first year teaching which I think is brilliant because when we came out nobody helped us and I did third, fourth, fifth and sixth class and did a Diploma and it was manic. If I had someone that I could've gone back to and talked to it would have been so great so I think that mentoring is brilliant.*

Madge (Class Teacher, School B) illustrated the practice of station teaching in her school which is how they addressed team teaching:

> *We grouped the children according to ability and then we basically had four different stations set up in the classroom. The SET worked at one station and I worked at another station and then there were two independent stations as well and we both basically had a checklist for comprehension that we both worked off. So really it's great because you got to sit with the group and we had fifteen minutes with each group which in fact doesn't sound like a lot but when they're small groups you do get to hear them read, to discuss it together as a group and you really get a feel for who is understanding what. We did that for a block of about six or seven weeks in total.*

Nora (Principal, School A) is an advocate for team teaching:

> *We have five class teachers which facilitates a fulltime learning support (SET) position, but team teaching is the way we go. I think it is the way to work but of course children are taken out on an individual basis or smaller group basis also. As regards to learning support ninety-five percent of learning support is in the classroom with the teacher.*

As a young, newly trained teacher, Joe (Class Teacher, School E) was grateful for the support of another teacher being present in the classroom in the team teaching context and outlined these benefits:

> *I would have been very nervous about teaching comprehension in general I suppose, and then with the children with special education needs, I would have been even more nervous, but was working with the experienced teacher and the SEN teacher coming in and doing the weekly plan, I think was very important. I knew that if I was doing something wrong I had someone to talk to and there was someone to tell me and explain it to me. When you're reading a story, when you're doing the questions on the story, there are two people in the class. So if you're forgetting something, if you're missing something, if something is over looked there*

is somebody else there to ask a question, or to do it as well.

In considering the factors that are necessary in formulating an inclusive and comprehensive programme in the teaching of reading, this data provides support that different models of team teaching support inclusion. The inclusion paradigm places responsibility with the school to make instructional changes in order to accommodate all pupils (King, 2007). In formulating an inclusive programme in the teaching of reading many factors as outlined by my participants need to be considered. Yet, despite the difficulties which some children present with, according to my evidence, almost all children can be helped to acquire skills in word recognition and comprehension through application of effective teaching methods (Butler and Stillman, 2002) and by teachers adapting flexible classroom practices that make learning easier for children such as the utilisation of visual timetables.

4.4.8. Additional Supports

One important aspect highlighted in the data was additional support, this referred to the provision of Special Needs Assistants, the employment of speech and language therapists and the use of visual timetables. Teresa (SET, School C) outlines what constitutes her learning support time and the role of the SNA in her context:

> *I would spend about seventy-five percent of my day within the mainstream class and I would solely be working on literacy during that time. So we very much feel we are able to meet all the children's needs, particularly in reading within class. If there is an SNA in the classroom, we would also use that support, maybe just to support a group by listening to their reading, especially if they were strong capable group then the SNA could be the guide in that instance*.

Therefore, the provision of an SNA can be an invaluable support in the classroom.

The role of the speech and language therapist provided outside of the school context also emerged as a factor which supported the child with SEN in the acquisition of skills necessary to recall information according to one special education teacher and two parents. Mary (Parent, School C):

> *We done a course with the senior speech and language therapist and she was*

> *showing us different methods of recalling information. She* [Mary's child] *would be able to read and then she'd be so concentrating on reading the words that she couldn't even recall what she had just read.*

Orla (Parent, School D) recalls:

> *He* [her child] *was in speech and language and that's the first place I heard about comprehension. Reading comprehension was never mentioned in the school. I never heard of reading comprehension and I never really fully realised how bad he was and that he didn't actually fully understand what he was reading*.

As a SET Teresa (School C) has learned:

> *From talking to speech therapists, they identify that with children that have literacy difficulties, it all leads back to the comprehension strategies. I think the most one that the speech therapist would be picking up on is visualisation... that they* [child with SEN] *actually aren't able to visualise what they've read. I suppose maybe because everything is so visual for them no matter they do; they've a telly, they've a computer, they've their games. So they don't need to create the pictures... it's there for them. So then when it comes to reading and it's just text, it's up to themselves to create the picture and I think that's what the problem is*.

These findings help us to understand that the role of the speech and language therapist can support the child in the area of recalling information, implementing visualisation strategies all of which facilitate the development of comprehension.

One class teacher, one special education teacher and one parent ascertained that visual timetables are necessary for some SEN children in order that they can negotiate their school day. Lena (Parent, School B) described how such an initiative helped her child:

> *They* [teachers] *do a visual timetable up on a piece of paper, they laminate it and everything, and it had for maths time a picture of his maths book underneath and for his reading time they had a picture of his reading book. He's so unorganised, he's all over the place. This was before we had the assessment done, and we hadn't a clue how to exactly tackle him time wise, but that was really good, they done that visual timetable up and they put the times on it. He knew what was coming next and this is what he needs.*

From this data it can therefore be assumed that helping children with their organisational skills gives them the strategies that will enable them to better negotiate their school day. This is vital especially for children with multiple needs and co-morbid conditions.

4.4.9 Provision for Special Educational Needs (Co-Morbid Conditions)

One class teacher, one special education teacher and three parents felt that it was necessary for schools to change their practice in order to accommodate the types of children that were presenting with diverse and sometimes co-morbid needs. Sheila (SET, School E) recalls:

> *I think the way we had to change was through necessity. We had to change our literacy because of seven children, two ADHD's, three dyslexic children and, two autistic children whose basic literacy coming out of the infants was poor so we had to change. We couldn't do just an ordinary curriculum.*

This evidence implies that systemic change is necessary in order to adequately address the needs of the child and to appropriately address additional issues which often present and that are outlined below.

Autism

Mona (Class Teacher, School D) refers to how the needs of a child presenting with autism were addressed in her school context by incorporating literacy support:

> *I had a child with autism last year who was very bright boy but his difficulty was social skills. We got him the social stories books and I put that in place for him and then he started enjoying it so much that I got the whole class to do the social stories and we all enjoyed them. Then we made our own ones, we wrote our own social stories about what we would do in different situations.*

Dyslexia (Specific Learning Difficulty) Support

Support for parents with regard to programme provision appeared to be lacking. Orla (Parent, School D) perceives that:

> *There's no supports whatsoever for a parent. They* [pupils] *get their score it's not broken down. There's no report to say they are actually strong in this area, but they are not strong in this area, and it's not broken down for you at all. Your child gets this really low score and your child is struggling, but you don't know what to do, you're bamboozled yourself. It would be important to have a specialised programme that is easy for the child to understand and easy for the parent to understand but this was not the case.*

An implication of this evidence is that supporting children in the area of social skills development is necessary as well as supporting parents by way of clear and concise reporting and clear home-school communication.

Because of processing difficulties, many children with dyslexia present with difficulties pertaining to organisational skills. Lena (Parent, School B) speaks of how she enabled her child to enhance his organisational skills:

> *We got a clear pencil case because he'd never have a pencil, I could buy him a thousand pencils and he'd lose them, but we have a big clear one, and he has his pencil. He has just one of everything he needs. He has folders for everything; an English folder, an Irish folder, a Maths folder, he has a folder for everything. He keeps everything sorted that way. All his pages, they all go into each subject folder, otherwise he wouldn't be able to find anything. It would be just everywhere. So, organisational skills would be a big thing*.

Dyspraxia (Developmental Coordination Delay)

It is not uncommon for children with SEN to present with other co-morbid conditions as well and this poses an additional challenge for parents and schools. Lena (Parent, School B) describes how this issue impacts her child and her family life: '*they said that he had dyslexia and dyspraxia. He just can't get himself organised, he's clumsy, the clumsy child isn't that what it's called as well?'* This evidence is further suggestive of the need for children to be taught organisational skills.

Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD)

Lyn (Parent, School E) articulated:

> *My child is now nine and there was a query about dyslexia. So he has been diagnosed with dyslexia and he's also on the Autistic Spectrum for behaviour and for socialisation skills.*

Lyn reflects that she would like to get more help from her child's school in dealing with her child's behaviour: '*just guidelines on how you get around the stubbornness and in him not being interested in reading anything. He says everything is boring. I would like help in how to get around that'.* From this evidence it can be inferred that class teachers need to be

trained in the area of supporting the child with EBD.

Gifted and Talented

Sheila (SET, School E) also endorses the need to embrace children with all types of needs:

> *I have to think of my other children who are in gifted and talented. So learning support was a wide umbrella, a wide umbrella but very much so because of my focus, I had to make sure that in the in-class situation that they were differentiated also as well as the pupils who had difficulties.*

Teachers also need up-skilling in the area of supporting children who are identified as being gifted and talented. Evidence based programmes need to be appropriately adapted and differentiated to meet the individual needs of all pupils, whether they are identified as late developers, presenting with dyslexia, precocious readers or gifted and talented (Svensson, 2008). The adaptation reading comprehension programmes has been identified as an area that is under-researched in the UK (Brooks, 2002). Teaching students strategies, such as predicting what might happen next, as an aid to reading comprehension is an effective method to aid the processing of text (Swanson and Hoskyn, 1998). According to my findings, it is of great importance that children should be given the opportunity to review and recall their prior knowledge of the subject matter of the text so that they will be able to survey and predict what knowledge they might gain from it. Viewing comprehension more as a connective activity and less as construction enables the reader to reconcile information and interpret it in a way which is more holistic. In light of SEN the self-esteem of the child must also be considered.

4.4.10 Self-Esteem

Two parents and two special education teachers discussed the issue of self-esteem and the child with SEN. Betty (Parent, School A) associates low self esteem as a hindrance to her

child's performance: '*I would say he rushes and he still has a little bit of a stigma attached to the fact that it is too hard and he says that he can't read*.'

Mary (Parent, School C) highlights more positive outcomes ensue for a child with SEN when schools consider the self esteem of the child and when they put supportive strategies in place to enable the child to become more independent at reading:

> *The teacher will send home a note to say that Joan is going to be picked to read a piece on Friday rather than randomly picking her, but to the other children she* [the teacher] *wants to make it appear she's randomly picking Joan. So then Joan has the confidence to stand up and to read the piece she has prepared at home. I suppose a lot of it too has to do with confidence. It's nice that the teacher is doing that*.

Sheila (SET, School E) was aware of how explicitly teaching in a particular curricular area in the one to one withdrawal context prior the child being exposed to this material in the whole class context could support their learning and thus enhance their self-esteem:

> *Because I could pre-teach the vocabulary in the one-to-one setting, when they came to it in the class situation then they have knowledge of course and their self-esteem as learners was improved so very much because of my role*.

Teresa (SET, School C) concurs with this concept:

> *For some pupils, to even have pre-taught work before it is covered in the classroom. Then for them they feel already one step ahead and that self-esteem wise for those pupils can be huge. On other occasions it works better maybe to start in the classroom with everybody and then provide the additional support in the withdrawal setting. So I think it's very much looking at the pupils that you're supporting and what would best support their needs*.

Therefore a suggestion that emerged from these findings is that schools should implement strategies that build self-esteem in children. This can be done with the assistance of a special needs assistant if available.

4.4.11 Teacher Preparation

Teacher preparation has been identified as a key element in sound inclusive practice according to two principals, three class teachers and two special education teachers.

Teachers should be skilled in their teaching and able to accommodate students' needs for instructive feedback as they read (The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000).

In light of this statement, it can be deduced that an important factor contributing to the success of teaching reading comprehension is that teachers should have solid preparation to deliver comprehension strategy instruction. Amanda (Principal, School B) concurs with this notion and advocates CPD for teachers:

> *We* [teachers] *have sought outside supports and we have done courses and the PDST did a very good course on comprehension but we have put a lot of emphasis on it in the school. It* [teacher preparation] *is of tantamount importance because it's very important to differentiate between what you are going to do with the average class and the special education needs pupils, you have to be cognisant of the fact that they won't necessarily be able to move along at the same pace, so we have to differentiate and find things, find questions at a level they are able for.*

Mari (Class Teacher, School A) recognises the need for up-skilling in the area of SEN for the mainstream class teacher:

> *When asked specifically about reading comprehension strategies for children with SEN I wouldn't think I have any special skills or anything like that. I suppose I would welcome more training on it*.

The notion of teacher effectiveness in supporting reading comprehension must also be discussed. Teacher expertise is considerably the single most important determinant of pupil performance, accounting for 40% of the difference in overall pupil performance in reading ability (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Madge (Class Teacher, School B) implies that specific instruction in the area of teaching reading comprehension is required in pre-service teacher education programmes:

> *I think that when you're doing teacher training maybe it's something that could be focussed on more. I've learned a lot of this* [reading comprehension strategy teaching skills] *through just being in the classroom and going to courses, I wouldn't have known about the reading comprehension unless I went to that* [CPD] *course in Dublin.*

Nora (Principal, School A) concludes that despite the fact that teachers attend training in reading comprehension nonetheless they often revert back to how they were taught in school themselves:

> *I went to college twenty something years ago and I remember the reading comprehension classes I don't know if we were prepared sufficiently well enough. I don't know if there was even enough knowledge around then even when we went to school ourselves. It was a new curriculum as such the 1970 curriculum but it was really word recognition. I suppose that's the way I learned myself and often times we tend to use the same methods that we know, no matter what.*

Nora determines that the need for adequate resources is necessary:

> *I think it's huge if you want to teach the comprehension skills properly you have to be well resourced. There's no one magic book that you can go to. I think like for example if you want to do the predicting you have to have a good selection of picture books.*

Una (SET, School A) outlined her training in SEN: '*I did the diploma in special needs in special education three years ago.*' However, this course is not available to mainstream class teachers. Teresa (SET, School E) who had completed a post-graduate diploma and Masters' Degree in SEN expands her role to embrace supporting the preparation of fellow colleagues:

> *Reading comprehension has been one of the huge areas that I've worked on so I have done even research myself on it and then as a result, that I'd support the other staff members in our school team as well. So it would be that I may go in initially to model the lessons and then that the teacher can continue it or that maybe I would support the teacher in implementing whatever reading programme or strategies that we worked on.*

Jane (Class Teacher, School C) warns that not every teacher has a flair for working in SEN and challenges arise in the absence of inadequate training:

> *My grá* [love] *isn't with special education needs. I love my classroom and I love having the whole class to teach. I suppose maybe my love for it* [SEN] *isn't there because I didn't really have done a lot of work with it or a lot of training for it. When I do something I like to be able to be trained in it, so I can say well, I have something to go back to, it's here, it's concrete. I can't teach something if I don't have anything to go back to. If I am implementing a programme that I am not trained in and that I know other schools are using, I ring other schools that were implementing it to ask them certain questions about how they were getting on, what*

they were doing when they encountered problems, what did they do and that's very important.

In the Irish context an SEN system was created in ten years that had taken our European counterparts thirty years to create (Carey, 2005). In relation to reading ability performance, my evidence supports the notion that teachers require additional support in their teaching of reading comprehension skills as well as on placing greater emphasis on planning reading, writing and oral language skills designed to enhance pupils' comprehension of text (Eivers et al., 2005). In relation to factors linked with better achievement in the acquisition of effective reading comprehension strategies teacher attendance at continuous professional development (CPD) courses in this area had a positive effect on reading comprehension scores. Therefore, the role of teacher preparation in the development of reading comprehension skills for pupils with SEN is vital. Teachers need to be adequately and appropriately prepared to effectively teach reading comprehension as was evident from my findings (Taylor et al., 2002). Outlining the factors which lead to improvement in this area teacher proficiency in the use of a range of word-recognition strategies and the appropriate use of higher level questioning skills are highlighted. This can only be achieved by the effective preparation of teachers in their endeavours to meet all the challenges encountered by children when they are faced with obstacles and barriers to comprehension when they are reading.

In light of my evidence it can be deduced that an important factor contributing to the success of teaching reading comprehension is that teachers should have solid preparation to deliver comprehension strategy instruction.

In addition to up-skilling in the area of SEN teaching methodologies, teachers also advised the necessity for the maintaining records pertaining to their pupils.

4.4.12 Record Keeping

Three of the special education teachers, one principal and one acting principal advised good record keeping and teacher planning.

Sheila (SET, School E) maintains that time for review and planning is important:

> *You have to use what's successful and don't be a slave to any one scheme... use the things that you want to use and find important and if you feel that your approach to literacy isn't working review it. What parts work, what parts don't and I think working closely with your colleague in a team teaching situation is very important. Going on summer schools nothing better than coming and being fused together and think we're not doing that, we should do that, so its evaluating your own practises and changing not just changing for the sake of it but because there's a need.*

Carrie (SET, School D) supports the mainstream class teacher with the junior classes:

> *By helping them* [children] *with their sounds. In a few months time when they* [infant class] *have books I will be going in* [to the classroom] *listening to the reading and just making notes about it and keeping a record of their daily reading*.

Mags (Acting Principal, School D) confirms the importance of the sharing of pupil's records:

> *When you get a new class you can access every child's file and see the comments of the previous teacher or if there was any issue or any reports or information from the SET who was working with the child*.

Joe (Class Teacher, School E) articulates the importance of developing an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for a child with SEN:

> *If they have special needs they'll have an IEP. So the first thing to do is look at the goals and targets of the IEP, depending on the area and depending on where they struggle; comprehension might not be a problem for some of them, but they might have a problem with written work, a problem with oral work, self esteem, confidence or it might be the communication side they have a problem with.*

Teresa (SET, School C) comments that knowledge of the child's abilities and weaknesses in learning is vital:

> *You need to know your child. I think that's the key and once you know the child then you are able to prepare better. You'll have identified what areas to work on and then it's very much about you preparing and planning work in these areas for*

the child yourself then.

These findings have important implications for whole-school review and planning of programmes, assessment of children, and goal setting for individual children. These good practices will ensure the best outcomes for pedagogy.

4.5 Pedagogy

Pedagogy as a theme emerged from the data based upon the participants' responses. Pedagogy in this instance refers to the approaches to teaching and the actual execution of the teaching strategies themselves. Pedagogy in this context is considered as the methods and practices of teaching currently used by teachers in my study. A major aim of this study was to ascertain what pedagogical intervention strategies were classified as best practice by schools and also to establish what intervention strategies work best for children with SEN in the classroom. This section presents data obtained from principals, mainstream class teachers and special education teachers in relation to intervention strategies, classroom practices, development of sight vocabulary, development of writing skills, early intervention, reading fluency, oral language, phonological awareness, provision of programmes and schemes, the practice of shared reading, skills necessary for effective reading, spelling, the use of technology, the use of drama, story and large format books and whole school organisation and the development of school policy.

4.5.1 Intervention Strategies

Intervention by way of teaching reading comprehension strategies is vital when considering best practice in the area of reading instruction (The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). This strongly points towards the effectiveness of teaching reading comprehension strategies as being critically important in the development of children's reading skills and as an aid to understanding what they are reading. My

research identified best practice in the area of reading comprehension teaching and identified which strategies work best for children presenting with SEN in the classroom.

One principal, one special education teacher and four class teachers identified what they described as best practice. Mari (Class Teacher, School A) identifies best practice as:

> *Picking a topic that the children are interested in would be a huge plus and being well prepared and having work that's targeted for certain children as well... like questions that would be suitable for the lower achievers and supplementary work for the higher achievers. Giving them opportunities to read through the text themselves, reading it for SEN children and sometimes doing pair work where they might discuss the text themselves among each other or in groups.*

Mona (Class Teacher, School D) renders best practice as:

> *That the child would be at their own instructional level. If the teacher is interested in reading and the teacher can impassion the children about a story and about the richness of information that you get and be excited about what you can get from reading, I think that all lends to best practise and I think it would be ideal to have a whole school approach.*

Nora (Principal, School A) classifies best practice as:

> *Collaborating with your peers, implementing a plan, assessing the children at the beginning and at the end of the year to see to see if it's working. You do your assessment, you come together, you decide on your plan, you implement it, you monitor it to see how you're getting on and you shake it all up then if you feel it needs it.*

Decoding difficulties and reading comprehension difficulties pose challenges for many children. Problems with phonological processing cause decoding difficulties, in contrast to reading comprehension difficulties that appear to be caused by problems with higher order language difficulties in addition to difficulties with semantics and grammar. Many poor comprehenders can appear to be adequate readers and have normal phonological decoding skills but still reveal difficulty in reading irregular words (Nation and Snowling, 1998a). These children have a less developed semantic memory system and reduced sensitivity to contextual information has an adverse impact on their ability to read (irregular) words that

are typically read with support from semantics. As a result, the word knowledge of poor comprehenders will increasingly remain behind their counterparts with average semantic processing skills as Nora reveals, in discussing best practice related to comprehension strategy teaching:

> *Of great importance is prediction, making connections, thinking aloud, questioning, clarifying and retelling is important too. Children with SEN, often learn to nod from a young age and that's one of their coping skills. They're smiling at you and you think everything is good, that they're happy and that everything is working well. So it is important to teach all the skills that I mentioned well.*

Joe (Class Teacher, School E) concludes that the team teaching setting offers the best opportunities for enhancement of reading comprehension skills:

> *There are a lot of children with special needs; they don't have confidence to ask questions because they don't believe in their own ability half the time you know. I have come across children, who just have no self esteem at all and they won't put their hand up and they won't ask a question. So I think, when you do reading comprehension with those children in class and having me listening to the conversations that are going on between children can boost them. They will get involved in a discussion if they don't agree with something, whereas, if you're doing a reading comprehension one to one out of the classroom, they're never going to get involved in a the discussion. They're never going to ask another child why did they say something. So team teaching, where comprehension is done on a whole class level and discussed at a whole class level works better. Then the written work, the activities are differentiated for different groups and the teachers go around rotating the different groups. For me I found it works very well.*

An over-lap exists between spoken language impairment and reading failure resulting in some children appearing, superficially at least, to read well, and serious reading and language impairments are not always obvious in children who have a good ability to decode phonologically (Nation et al., 2004). Despite their ability to read fluently and accurately many children are poor at comprehending what they have read. Sheila (SET, School E) outlines the following common factors as being conducive to best practice:

> *Reading for meaning, actually reading; do they understand?, have they got the words?, have they got the language?, do they understand what that word means?, can they put it into a context?, can they use the word? Don't take for granted that they might have prior knowledge of a topic. Also of importance is their interests; matching up children's interests with particularly what they are reading in the non-*

> *fiction, that's been a revelation to me this year. The children who have significant reading difficulties love facts and can retain them and retention is obviously very, very, important. Also can they transfer the skills from one area to the other?*

Jane (Class Teacher, School C) postulates: '*doing something different like Literacy Lift-Off and it is working for us in our school.'*

One parent, Orla (Parent, School D) approves of the multi-sensory approach as a methodology that suited her child's needs as a kinaesthetic learner very well:

> *There's this realisation that he is a kinaesthetic learner, it is the multi-sensory approach that helps him with his dyslexia as well and that is being applied in the classroom as well even with learning his tables*.

This evidence suggests the needs for the application of many approaches and methodologies that take cognisance of multi-sensory techniques. The evidence which identified strategies such as selection of appropriate material at the instructional and interest level of the child, employing a variety of questioning skills, planning, assessing, reviewing and providing time for consolidation and review of material, concurs with The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000), that effective readers need to be competent in the following components of reading; phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. These components provide a balanced approach to the teaching of reading, integrating the skills-based approach and the meaning-emphasis approach. The positive influence on the development of the reading-writing link (Ruddell, 2002) has also been evidenced. It might seem that good pedagogical skills are sufficient in the teaching of reading and comprehension instruction and this translates to effective classroom practice.

4.5.2 Classroom Practice

Two principals and one class teacher described classroom practice in their schools and Nora (Principal, School A) proposes areas for improvement and development:

> *We use a whole class reader but we also use shared reading books. In the junior end we have the Oxford Tree and we would have the other shared reading books like "Chip and Biff" and we have quite an extensive library. In the senior end we do shared reading with the parents at home. What we have are complementary books that go along with the Reading Zone Scheme, which is the scheme we're using in class. Now, in the last six months we have begun to look at introducing a graded scheme of shared reading books PM Series of readers. We're quite anxious to introduce something like that because we feel that at the moment, while we are doing shared reading, we're not a hundred percent sure if it's suited to the right level. With the SEN children; we are not quite confident that those children are presently getting books to suit their level... but when you have thirty-one children in a mainstream class we're interested in the graded readers because we think it'll be more suited to each particular child's needs*.

John (Principal, School C) describes SEN pedagogical practice in his school:

> *Ninety-five percent of our learning support is in in-class. It works for us but then again it has to be reviewed on a termly basis. We have a particularly weak group in the school at the moment and they will need extra help that is being targeted at them at the moment. We carry out tests and we group them into various levels of ability ranging from the weaker children to middle standard and to high standard and the SET comes in on a daily basis. She works on reading comprehension for three sessions a week and spelling activities another three days a week. The SET would work directly with the weaker group*.

Jane (Class Teacher, School C) recommends the following programmes and schemes as a support in delivering and adapting the curriculum for children with SEN:

> *We use the Swist programme for the spelling; we have the Building Bridges for comprehension. We use a lot of readers for Literacy Lift-Off. I would use a story. If I wanted to do a large format book, instead of me reading it, I might record myself reading it at the weekend, and the children rather than sitting looking at me reading, just have to listen to it on a recorder. They are not only just listening to me all the time, they are experiencing a different way of the story being read and I find that works great for some of the kids that would struggle that bit. We have i Pads and there are a lot of stories you can get for the children to read on the i Pads as well as on You Tube.*

This extract reveals teacher knowledge of a range of approaches and resources and their preparedness to vary their repertoire to suit the literacy needs and levels of the children. Therefore what we need for effective teaching and reading is that teachers have different strategies that they can choose from and apply as appropriate.

Considering Reading Comprehension as a process that requires an intentional and thoughtful interaction between the reader and the text (Lerner, 2006), the reader should be enabled to bridge the gap that exists between what they are reading and the knowledge which they already possess in order to make sense of it. The comprehension of reading depends on what the reader brings to the written material by way of experience, knowledge of language and recognition of syntactic structure (Lerner, 2006). This can be enhanced through effective classroom practice. Comprehension is the construction of meaning from printed material that requires the use of background knowledge, which the reader brings, in conjunction with the material that is found on the printed page (Primary Curriculum Support Programme, 2008). This can be enabled by the development of sight vocabulary.

4.5.3 Developing Sight Vocabulary

Slower rates of vocabulary growth are noted in children with specific reading comprehension difficulties than same-age peers with good reading comprehension, therefore both reading habits and reading comprehension are contributing factors to vocabulary growth and development. The importance of encouraging early reading habits and fostering the motivation to read in developing readers enables the development of sight vocabulary (Cain and Oakhill, 2011).

The development of sight vocabulary was considered by one principal, one special education teacher, one parent and two class teachers as an important element in pedagogical practice relating to the development of reading comprehension as word identification poses a lot of problems for some children: '*she wouldn't be able to look at a word and identify it immediately you know*.' (Mary, Parent, School C). Lorna (SET, School B) enlists the lack of vocabulary as a mitigating factor in the development of reading comprehension:

> *I found that with the weaker children what they found difficult was the lack of vocabulary. That stopped them interpreting and reconciling information as they didn't have the vocabulary to begin with. They didn't even understand the most basic vocabulary. You could read a passage for example: "she looked in astonishment"; what was astonishment?, they don't get astonishment and there is an awful lot of inferential information in that word. It tells us a lot about the story but if you don't understand the word "astonishment", you're missing a lot. So they need to be able to understand the words first in a basic literal sense and then teach the comprehension strategies in order to help them to make meaning that's not necessarily explicitly there you know. First there's the vocabulary building, then teaching the ability to connect with the word. They can then bring their prior knowledge to it. Good readers do it naturally. It's good to ask children if there is anything in this* [text] *that's familiar to me so that then they engage prior knowledge and develop meaning*.

Encouraging word awareness, enhances the vocabulary development for pupils with reading and learning difficulties and vocabulary instruction should include provision of both explicit and incidental teaching and learning of words, instruction in word-learning strategies, providing repeated exposure to words that have been already understood, enabling pupils to access new words in a variety of contexts, selecting words used frequently for instruction and encouraging active pupil dialogue and engagement with words (Reynor, 2014).

Mari (Class Teacher, School A) describes the following strategy for teaching the acquisition of basic skills in vocabulary development:

> *They also have words that they'd learn in one reader and then move on to the next reader. They would learn the words by Look Say, off by heart and very often they'd be learning them by rote I suppose. We do a word wall, so there'd be a word wall in the classroom where new words met would go on the word wall and we'd discuss them.*

The dual-route model (Coltheart, 1978) proposed in the above extract suggests that skilled readers have at their disposal two different processes for converting print to speech. The first route (called the lexical semantic route), goes through the lexicons and the semantic system. The second route (called the letter-to-sound conversion rule procedure) or the sublexical route is so called because the sound of a word is produced by mapping

sublexical letter units, for example graphemes and syllables, onto sounds without consulting the lexicon. According to this dual-route model, oral reading can be brought about through the lexical semantic route, the sublexical route, or collaboration between the two. As it not possible for word reading word to be achieved by this route because sublexical rules cannot be applied to irregular words, pupils with poor comprehension ability are unlikely to achieve correct word reading by the semantic route. Hence, it may be argued that a direct route is needed for accessing the pronunciation of words without accessing semantic information as outlined by Mona who describes how she teaches vocabulary development in the context of a story:

> *I'd skim through the chapter before we read it and I'd teach them words first. Then I'd ask them to put the words in a sentence. I have a flip-chart in the room, that's my word wall and we write all those words up there. So they're helping each other because they're working in groups*.

Decoding makes a large contribution to reading ability for children who present with reading difficulties (Gustafson et al., 2013). This also concurs with the following extract by Teresa who claims that children with more general reading difficulties benefit from broad interventions that have a combination of several different bottom-up processes, as well as top-down processes (Gustafson et al., 2011):

> *For them to be effective readers they need to have a great grasp of phonics. I think that is the key in their whole sight vocabulary development. If they have that their reading becomes easier and I think then if they're able to read effectively then that will have a knock-on effect that they will be able to comprehend. Using picture cues also helps. Or if they're getting stuck on a word that they can read on and come back to it and try and make it out from the context of the sentence. I think from comprehension, is such a huge area for children with special education needs that I know even from my own case load, the majority of them would have comprehension difficulties and I think you know there's no support only for their learning support. In the UK it's different I learned that from talking to the psychologist. I think it's an area that maybe we need to place an emphasis on, even vocabulary development is something that you can really see lacking in the children. They'll read something and they will be completely oblivious to words or as to what they mean, so I think comprehension starts at vocabulary really and builds from there. I think even for children with SEN, we can sometimes take for granted that they know what a word means. One day the word "jug" came up in reading and I was surprised because in a group of four, two of them didn't know what a jug was! I think it leads back to listening to the children, the child's voice, that's where we get some of our answers*

to it I think.

These findings suggest that the development of sight vocabulary is a vital component in the acquisition of reading skills and that a lack in vocabulary development is a mitigating factor in the development of comprehension. Understanding word meanings and applying prior knowledge and extending vocabulary was outlined as necessary as were the implementation of effective strategies such as compiling word walls and using picture cues as an aid to vocabulary development.

These extracts acknowledge an awareness of the development of a conceptual knowledge of the nature of written language and its relationship to the spoken word and thus helps to foster the development of reading comprehension (Frith, 1985). It acknowledges how print functions, the form of print and the realisation that spoken words can be broken down into sounds or phonemes. The skills-based approach stresses the importance of teaching children the skills necessary for decoding and interpreting text in order that they will at a later stage, be enabled to comprehend what they are reading (Kelly, 2008). Thus it develops comprehension skills and strategies to facilitate the processing of texts. In my research I identified the aforementioned strategies that teachers are currently using in order to enable their pupils with SEN to develop reading comprehension skills. This enables teachers to differentiate the curriculum.

As highlighted in the literature review, one model for understanding reading is the Simple View and the data indicates that this model is useful to practitioners in that the clear differentiation between the two dimensions provides a framework that makes explicit that different types of teaching are needed to develop word recognition skills from those that are needed to develop the comprehension of spoken and written language. However, it must also be recognised that the task of word reading is generally achieved as a result of direct instruction. The simple view advocates best practice in learning to read as starting

with an early short, focused delivery of phonics teaching, yielding to lifelong work on comprehension (Graham and Kelly, 2008).

In order to develop sight vocabulary, Carrie (SET, School D) uses the following strategy:

> *I teach them how to skim and scan and to pick out important words and also pick out words that they don't know then we look at these words and write the words on the board and I get them to use and explain the word.*

4.5.4 Developing Writing Skills

Developing rich vocabulary through oral language, reading, and writing instruction is therefore essential to developing a balanced literacy programme (Kucan, 2012). Mags (Acting Principal, School D) illustrates pedagogical methodology surrounding the development of writing skills in her team teaching context:

> *We certainly would use a story book in the team teaching and then there's a writing table, a free writing table, then maybe I work with senior infants so we would have gluing and sticking and at the moment we're looking at penmanship at another teacher lead table*.

Joe (Class Teacher, School E) teaches writing in the context of a story:

> *If we're doing a large format book there will be written work and they will answer questions. The junior infants would be mainly asked to draw something whereas the senior infants would be writing sentences based on the big book.*

This evidence provides an important insight in the use of story as an aid to developing comprehension. The issue of early intervention was also advocated.

4.5.5 Early Intervention

In assessing children with and without reading disabilities on measures of short-term memory and working memory, children with reading disabilities are particularly disadvantaged on short term memory measures that require the recall of phonemes and digit sequences and on working memory measures that require the simultaneous processing and storage of digits within sentence sequences and final words from unrelated sentences

simultaneously. In children presenting with reading disabilities, those aspects of the phonological system that are problematic related to the accurate access to speech codes and those aspects of the executive system that appeared faulty are related to the simultaneous monitoring of cognitive processing and storage demands (Swanson et al., 2009a). Therefore, teachers need to be aware that children with reading disabilities may perform well on specific cognitive tasks because those tasks do not place heavy demands on working memory processing. Two principals, two parents, two special education teachers and one class teacher outlined the pedagogical practice that they advocate as being conducive to sound early intervention necessary to counteract this. Amanda (Principal, School B) indicates:

> *From the day they come into the school we place emphasis on pre-reading, reading readiness and early intervention strategies. I think they definitely need a very good basis of phonics and they need to know the rules of literacy, the phonic rules first of all, and then I think they need to be allowed to read at their own level for as long as it takes for them to progress. I think the old fashioned way of giving them a book A, then B, then C, and then D is not a good idea, because some children may need to be at A for quite a while, or A and B for quite a while. Where some children can go to D, E, F or whatever much quicker, I think really it's a very individual thing, and I think they need to have a good oral language first, because if they don't have the language, like for instance, you know positional words like above, behind. If children don't understand those, they can't really understand what they are reading, you know, so a good oral language basis is also important and rhyme and you know alliteration and all other things that go with it are very important, clapping, hearing sounds and language, breaking up words. We do a lot with Sounds Abound and Sound Linkage. That would be our early intervention strategies.*

However, Betty's (Parent, School A) experience was at odds with the some of the advice offered by Amanda:

> *It* [her child's teaching of reading] *was all phonic based. He'd get stuck with the tricky words. Definitely for the likes of my child that had definitely some difficulty, the phonics way of teaching the reading didn't work for him... he struggled. There were the sight "look and say" words which he was brilliant at.*

Lena (Parent, School B) advises that prior to a child attending school, parents should be made aware of the teaching programmes used in the early years:

> *I think at the very beginning, before they even go in the door to school, we* [parents] *should all be taught what the children are about to be taught such as in the Jolly Phonics; how it's taught and how we're meant to understand it because that's where it all starts for them. I think it should start there at the very beginning*.

The following extracts consider the necessity for comprehension of different units of language: the understanding of single words, sentences, and connected prose and outlined what readers (and listeners) need to do to successfully comprehend an extended text (Cain, Oakhill and Elbro, 2015). Thus, the many complex skills in reading can be divided in two groups: those that support word reading or decoding and also those that support language comprehension. Mari (Class Teacher, School A) outlines what in her practice are the necessary elements that constitutes this type of intervention:

> *Teaching word recognition skills is important. All the children in my group would have completed the Jolly Phonics Programme and that definitely helps with their word recognition skills but they also would work on Dolch Lists. They would work on tricky words which are the words that can't be decoded as normal. They'd be learning them in a Look Say way and that really helps.*

Mona (Class Teacher, School D) concurs with the above: '*in infants they need to know their sight words, their phonics and word attack skills*.' Nora (Principal, School A) advises against a "one size fits all programme" in the early years:

> *The Jolly Phonics Programme definitely works but I don't know if it works with every child. For example I have a child in my class who has Downs Syndrome and phonics don't seem to work well for him. I suppose in the junior classes teachers need to recognise that every child is a different type of learner*.

Sheila (SET, School E) outlines early intervention strategies as follows:

> *We use a graded reading scheme. Children do decode words and that's how they learn to read but the comprehension skills need to be taught as well. There's two ways of actually introducing this: the oral language one, which is actually the children's language, so they can talk about it. But then of course we have to get their understanding, prediction of the text, what's happened, so we go through all these kind of pre reading skills and that carries on for most of the infants. We bring in initial sounds, not just for decoding purposes. Whether it's a look and say or a phonic approach, I personally believe in the marrying of the two together. You can't do the other two skills without having the oral language. Your SEN children's language is limited, so skills building, the phonics initial sounds, CVC's, building up to end blends, initial blends, also the look and say, so that children see the shape of a word, they see the letters, they know that this is "look", and they do it by repetition, practice and drill.*

Teresa (SET, School C) is consistent with this opinion:

> *I'm very much a firm believer that if there's an emphasis put on phonics and oral language initially in the junior and senior infants that can have a huge impact on their reading after that. If a child is struggling and if we can catch them early, that whole idea of early intervention and prevention I think is key.*

The idea of students working on individual reading skills until a certain level of proficiency is achieved and then progressing to the next reading skill, with little attention given to how these various parts come together in real-life reading distorts the development of reading fluency. Taken together, these findings promote the need for good oral language teaching, phonological awareness training, development of a sight vocabulary, word recognition and word-attack skills and the use of graded reading schemes. This will also enable reading fluency.

4.5.6 Reading Fluency

Difficulties in reading fluency is one contributory factor to the presence of reading difficulties (Rasinski et al., 2009). More authentic approaches to fluency teaching, such as approaches that suggest that texts should be practiced and performed are advocated. One parent, Lena (Parent, School B) disclosed that lack of fluency was another issue that compounded her son's reading development: '*he'd have to like point at the word and he'd say that word, and then he'd go on to the next word; it wasn't very fluent you know*.'

Naming speed, decoding, and language were uniquely associated with reading fluency (Barth et al., 2009). As the ability to access and retrieve phonological information from long-term storage is an essential factor in explaining individual differences in reading fluency, adequate word reading accuracy skills are necessary if a reader is to attain fluency. It is necessary that the reader develops strong grapheme–phoneme mapping skills so that infrequent presentations of a given word in text lead to strong representations of the word

in the reader's memory. The student's ability to process language for meaning has a significant influence on reading fluency. Students are better able to comprehend connected text and read it fluently if they are taught teaching comprehension strategies that help them to gain an understanding for words (i.e., vocabulary).

4.5.7 Oral Language

Early-emerging oral language problems that are present prior to the development of reading include difficulties in processing grammatical information in spoken language, deficient performance on general measures of language comprehension and inadequate vocabulary knowledge (Hulme and Snowling, 2011). Although many of the language difficulties experienced by children are not severe enough for them to be diagnosed as having a language impairment, however, much of these difficulties are obvious in their reading comprehension issues. Many children experience difficulties with both word-recognition and language-comprehension skills, and such children may require interventions that address both of these problems, therefore two class teachers and one special education teacher identified the development of oral language skills as being a very important feature in reading comprehension acquisition. Mari (Class Teacher, School A) asserts that: '*oral language would be huge in helping with their skills for comprehension and for being an effective reader.*' Madge (Class Teacher, School B) recalls:

> *I remember the inspector being in and I asked her advice on oral language. I remember her saying to take the SEN group out and just work specifically on life skills, on vocabulary to do with out and about in town; reading timetables, school timetables, bus timetables and doing comprehension based on that. There was no point going down the road of inferences with the SEN children because that was not what suited them best at that particular time.*

Joe (Class Teacher, School E) introduces oral language as early as junior infants:

> *I think oral language is very important for them to be able to understand something at infant level. We discuss the content of our stories and there's a proper conversation going on in the class room. They can question and ask about the story even before you even give them the title. I think they need to talk and although one*

> *to one is very beneficial, I think talking in a group, hearing other peoples questions and hearing how other pupils are thinking about a story improves oral language.*

Getting students to actively build meaning while reading does not necessitate knowledge of and focus on specific strategies, but, rather it requires attention to text content in ways that promote attending to important ideas and establishing connections between them (McKeown et al., 2009). Developing strategies instruction is effective and discussion-based practices are effective for reading comprehension enhancement and Sheila (SET, School E) emphasises using the child's own language as a starting point:

> *Actually start using the children's own language, so they can talk about something, they can pick up a book, they can look at it, they can talk through the pictures and get picture cues. I can't stress how important the oral language is, if children can talk about it and they understand the story, can they remember it and can they put things in sequence; what happened first. All of these skills and strategies help their reading and their enjoyment of reading and knowing that it's not just about words, that the story means something. Children love books, picture books in particular, they love it with a little bit of text, again their reading does develop, and again the oral language develops. See if they can they talk about it, can they say why do you think this is going to happen, can they put things in a chronological order, then can they mix it up a little bit and say what happens next? So the language comes together.*

A finding that emerged from this analysis is that the development of a social skills vocabulary, providing time for discussion, development of sequencing and ordering skills and use of the child's own language experience are all conducive to the development of oral language. Direct instruction assumes that reading can be decomposed into identifiable sub skills that, when taught directly, will improve children's reading ability (Stahl, 1997). These direct instruction programmes are most effective when they are used in conjunction with wide reading thus enhancing comprehension (Meyer, 1983). In breaking down language into components that are taught in isolation the direct instruction approach therefore does not enhance the learning of reading within its meaningful context hence comprehension is also compromised.

In direct instruction, the assumption is made that, as the learner becomes better able to use a particular strategy, then their use of that strategy while reading will become automatic (Kameenui et al., 1997). However, my findings indicated that children presenting with SEN often encounter great difficulty in making this transfer (Ott, 1997). The emphasis on practising the strategy in the context of reading the text is therefore a strength of the explicit explanation model as it leads the pupil along the continuum from the responsibility for using the strategy lying with the teacher to the pupil independently using the strategy themselves; it is therefore a more inclusive model. This approach presents a contrasting approach to the whole language or meaning-emphasis approach which advocates that oral language is learned without direct instruction because it serves a purpose for the learner (Keene and Zimmermann, 2007). This purpose is the enhancement of comprehension. In explicit explanation the gradual release from teacher to pupil of the responsibility for the execution of a strategy consolidates a deeper "ownership" of the use of the strategy and as a result comprehension is better enhanced. In practice the cognitive-apprenticeship models share many components with whole-language instruction in that they both treat the task of reading holistically and are therefore inclusive models; they do not teach sub-skills in isolation. My findings reveal that in the teaching of reading, isolating a strategy often distorts it, making it difficult to use in "real" reading thus comprehension is restricted (Hall, 2003). The meaning- emphasis approach stresses that reading should be a thinking process and driven 'top-down' by a search for meaning in which different cue-systems are orchestrated (Goodman, 1967). Therefore, a pertinent question within my research examined how the teaching of reading comprehension as a learning skill in content areas is achieved within the inclusive setting.

4.5.8 Phonological Awareness

There is a need for a focus on the development language skills for children with dyslexia, as phonological difficulties, reading comprehension and language skills are a recurring

challenge for these children (Reynor, 2018a). There is a need for these challenges to be addressed primarily in the early years of schooling because language and comprehension are meaning related skills and they are inextricably linked with children's growth as readers. One parent, one class teacher, one special education teacher and one principal described how they enabled their pupils with SEN to integrate these decoding skills. Amanda (Principal, School B) warns that: '*because they have got the strategies to decode and breakdown words don't mean that they understand what they are reading. So, I think comprehension is a huge aspect of teaching of reading*.' Carrie (SET, School D) suggest the following pedagogical practice:

> *They need to know the mechanics of reading and the phonics first of all and how to break down words. Word attack skills are necessary and teaching the high frequency words. I use the Phonological Awareness Training Programme (PAT). It is really good to help with decoding and word recognition. We invested a lot of money in Lexia, but I think a lot of the children now prefer Nessy which is really good for teaching phonics, language and vocabulary.*

These extracts imply that reading is the outcome of a process that involves interactions between the sounds of words, their spellings and their meanings (Adams, 1990). At the initial stages of reading development as outlined in the following extract, the child's cognitive resources are devoted to establishing the so -called phonological pathway which is a system for mapping letters onto sounds. This lays the foundation for decoding both real words and pseudo words. Acquiring the three main components of the alphabetic principle: awareness of the phonemic structure of speech, knowledge of letter sounds, and appreciation of the links between letters and sounds in the orthography (Catts and Kamhi, 2005), enables the establishment of the phonological pathway as Lyn (Parent, School E) relates:

> *The Jolly Phonics was where he learned the sounds, and then he put the sounds together and spelled out the sounds of how the word is, that's how he learned. He did not learn words off by heart. He learned by looking and phonetically pronouncing the sounds. He's very good at phonics and the teacher would say this was his saving grace*.

Jane (Class Teacher, School C) integrated phonic teaching in her school's station teaching model: '*we set up a phonics station where we worked on phonics based on the books the children were reading that week*.'

We therefore can deduce that decoding skills alone are not conducive to developing understanding and comprehension and this can be enhanced by the use of a station teaching model where developing phonological awareness can be addressed in the context of real reading. Combining semantic and syntactic information about words stored in long-term memory with local information about the sentence context, information can be contextualised in working memory (Kintsch and Mangalath, 2011) as long-term semantic word memory summarises all the experiences a person has had with that word. Therefore, meaning needs to be constructed in context and is therefore always contextual.

However, in order to enhance comprehension, this short, focused delivery of phonics teaching as outlined in the 'simple view' should take place within the context of reading and not through words presented singly out of context as this task is often a major challenge for children especially those children presenting with SEN. Over-reliance on phonics teaching without sufficient cognisance of language experience creates little progress in the area of comprehension (Goodman, 1967). While decoding skills may enable comprehension, they do not however ensure it. Word recognition (decoding) is influenced by a pupil's knowledge of words and language. The use of appropriate programmes and schemes can be of great benefit.

4.5.9 Programmes and Schemes

Two principals, one parent and one class teacher outline some of the programmes and schemes in use in their schools that they considered conducive to the development of reading in children with SEN. Amanda (Principal, School B) encourages:

> *Having a really good range of reading material which includes material to suit the needs of every level of children. If you have a very wide range of appropriate material they feel they are not being left out of anything that's going on in the classroom.*

Lena (Parent, School B) commends the Toe by Toe programme: '*the Toe by Toe programme was brilliant, he's still doing Toe by Toe and he doesn't mind doing it. So it has helped him a lot actually*.' Maureen (Principal, School E) incorporates real reading in her choice of scheme:

> *It's the only children's magazine in Ireland. It's called Primary Planet. It has every subject in it and it is especially good for children with dyslexia because it has short pieces of information. There's a photograph or a picture and then there's a short piece of information. The children use it for homework and the parents are encouraged to help them to use it as well.*

Jane (Class Teacher, School C) comprehensively described the organisation of station teaching programme conducted in School C:

> *The stations consisted of a phonics station where we worked on phonics based on the books the children were reading that week. Then we had a station where we revised the reading they had done the day before. Then we had a station for new reading. We had a station for writing about the story that they had done and then there was a station for listening to the story. It meant that the children were getting a chance to cover a variety of different things in terms of literacy. They were listening, they were writing, they were doing phonics. We did have books for it and they were all levelled readers which were brilliant and I suppose we wouldn't have been able to do it without the support of the principal and the SET and the SNA. We found that after the six weeks when we tested the children again we had average improvement of age of about two years in reading.*

One principal, John (Principal, School C) describes his disadvantaged school status:

> *We're a DEIS school and we are trying to target the parents who we need to target. We have a homework club after school. Some of that can be based on comprehension exercises. We've fourteen children working in the homework club*

> *after school and two parents come in and work with the SET in that room where their child is and because they would struggle academically themselves and part of it would be reading.*

Providing a wide and varied range of appropriate materials, programmes, schemes and models of classroom organisation and after-school supports all contribute to differentiation and support children with SEN.

One special education teacher, Sheila (SET, School E) organises the Peer Tutoring for Reading Fluency programme:

> *When you are reading a passage, stop ask them questions. Reading in pairs is a success because they feel quite confident in answering questions asked by their peers, rather than from an adult. They don't feel as threatened. The way we've organised this shared reading in pairs, you can use that model for a lot of other skills that you want to impart. We do change the pairings. We assess and then we change the pairings so there is a tutor and a tutee in each pairing and that model works.*

This is indicative of an appropriate model for the classroom organisation of a shared reading programme.

4.5.10 Shared Reading

Comprehending the psychological aspects of stories, inference- making skills and understanding and recall of main narrative elements are conducive to good comprehension (Paris and Paris, 2007). Beginning readers' emerging narrative knowledge in primary classrooms can be enhanced by minimising the burden that decoding places on the student and all children can benefit from instruction that is motivating and authentic provided by a shared reading programme. One parent, one class teacher and two special education teachers outlined the benefits of using a shared reading programme. Sheila (SET, School E) outlines:

> *So I think very much that they need to understand the book, share the book, share the book with an adult, share the book with another child and I think shared reading, the way we all organised it, it came about through necessity. For those*

children who have such significant needs I think we've organised it in such a way that the shared reading has been amazing, because the progress has been amazing. You're talking two years plus reading age in a short time and it's carried through, if there's been a lull it's carried through because their attention is there and so is the enjoyment of reading. To see really dyslexic children enjoying reading and not just fiction but non-fiction as well is great. They say a lot of children with special needs should not have non-fiction because the vocabulary is too abstract. Now the evidence that we've formulated is that the children, once they have learned the significant skills, absolutely thirst for general knowledge and that's been a huge revelation to me.

Betty (Parent, School A) describes how she is involved in a shared reading scheme in her child's school:

They have the shared reading booklet with the name of the book, how many pages they've read and then the parent must sign it every night. As they go up the school, in the senior end of the school they get a book for a week so it's not every night having to sign a page, whereas down in the junior infant's room they would have a book a night, a different book a night. It starts off down in the junior end and there's a slip sent in with the booklet to explain what the shared reading programme is all about; sitting, discussing the book with your child, asking them questions on the book, what did they like about the book and just getting them involved orally and developing their oral language.

Carrie (SET, School D) described the organisation of the practice of shared reading in the classroom context in her school:

We call it paired reading or buddy reading. We find the paired reading helps when the SEN child is listening to an older child or a child in the same class who's a better reader reading to them. I firstly model how you're supposed to read, how you should use your tone of voice, discuss the pictures and ask questions about the story.

Mari (Class teacher, School A) outlines how a shared reading programme has developed in her school:

We have a shared reading system where the child would exchange books everyday. It is very good for differentiation for better readers. We give guidelines at the beginning of a year to parents in order to facilitate the development of comprehension through shared reading. Parents would be instructed to find a quiet place, quiet time, discuss the book with the child, the cover, the author, the illustrator, what the text might be about, read through it with them, let them lead the reading, if they get stuck help them, let them go through any new words and then discuss what happened in the story afterwards and retell where possible.

Presenting this evidence that outlines the practice of shared reading illustrates that it is a

practice that is conducive to the development of reading skills both from the school and home contexts.

Viewing reading as a psycholinguistic guessing game (espoused by the meaning-emphasis approach) in which skilled readers use their knowledge of language (vocabulary and syntax) together with knowledge of the topic, to predict many of the words on the page, thus enabling the development of comprehension (Goodman, 1967), then the ability to predict is an important element which is highly interactive and reciprocal in its nature. As this is the way in which skilled readers operate, this approach advocates the need for even beginning readers and especially pupils with SEN to learn to use the same ‘guess-from-meaning’ strategy. A key belief underpinning this approach is that children learn to read in much the same way as they learned to use speech to communicate.

My evidence concurs with the psycholinguists 'cue systems' model (Goodman, 1967) that underpins a 'whole language' perspective with the strength of this model placing emphasis on its recognition of the broader view of reading. While it recognises that words and letters are still important it does not dismiss the other information which children bring to reading and encompasses the need for comprehension development. Not all models of the reading process however adopt knowledge and skills versus the meaning-emphasis approach and many espouse to the interweaving of the two approaches as my findings suggest. Finding the best match between the epistemology of an approach and the best understanding of the nature of reading instruction is not easy for schools. This point is important to the understanding of my study, as it acknowledged that comprehension teaching can be conducted within a meaningful context using strategies which incorporate the meaning-emphasis approach to reading. This was ascertained by asking teachers how they addressed the issue of using comprehension strategies to encourage successful reading in the inclusive classroom.

My findings acknowledge the interweaving of the semantic, syntactic and grapho-phonic cue-systems bringing the disciplines of psychology and linguistics together in this meaning-emphasis approach to the teaching of reading. Considering reading as much more than the decoding of black marks upon a page but more so a quest for meaning and one which requires the reader to be an active participant (Cox, 1991:133), assimilating phonic (sound and spelling) knowledge; grammatical knowledge; word recognition and graphic knowledge; and knowledge of context seeks to incorporate the whole complexity of reading thus comprehension is enhanced. These four cue-systems or 'searchlights' are strategies that readers use according to my evidence when addressing text and they call upon these sources of knowledge in order to illuminate their processing (Graham and Kelly, 2008). However, the reconstruction of the searchlights model into the two components of reading (word recognition, language comprehension) that are present but confounded within it, would further progress towards the objective of using evidence derived from psychological research to inform pedagogical practice (DfES, 2006). However, in relation to this, according to my research, one must remain aware of the progress made in the understanding of each components' usefulness in informing the practice of teaching. It is necessary that these components are an integral part of any reading programme, otherwise its effectiveness might be compromised (Washtell, 2008). A whole language approach also involves the implementation of the meaning-emphasis approach.

A child's reading development is enhanced in many ways when the whole language approach is skilfully implemented (Pressley, 1998). This embodies many teaching strategies such as reading good literature to students every day and providing real literature and books. Providing time for shared reading (Holdaway, 1979) within a class context is

excellent for children. Within my research I found the extent to which parents felt enabled to assist their children with the development of reading comprehension skills was minimal. Guided Reading is also an effective way of developing a strategic, reflective and critical approach in children. This approach addresses the need to help students become efficient in comprehending text of various levels of complexity (DfEE, 1998).

4.5.11 Skills for Effective Reading

Teaching students specific procedures to direct their access to text during reading of the text develops strategy instruction encourages students to think about their mental processes and, on that basis, to execute specific strategies with which to interact with text (McKeown et al., 2009). Thus using such strategies as summarisation, cooperative learning, graphic and semantic organisers, story structure, question answering, question generation and comprehension monitoring are all supported by four class teachers, two special education teachers and two principals outlined the skills that they felt were necessary in order to read effectively. Amanda (Principal, School B) postulates that:

> *They* [children] *won't improve their reading skills unless they improve their comprehension, because if they don't understand what they are reading, they won't get the gist of it, they won't be able to answer questions on it, they won't be able to enjoy it, they won't be able to enjoy a story if they don't understand it. So, they have to be given the skills and the little strategies they can use, like looking at a picture or checking the sentence before or the sentence after or see what went before or what did they think might happen next.*

Carrie (SET, School D) notes:

> *They* [children] *need to have and to experience books... going from turning pages, to looking at pictures and having an interest in it. I suppose even seeing the other adults, seeing their parents reading and being read to at a young age all helps you to develop an interest and then a love for reading.*

Lorna (SET, School B) admonishes that teaching the skills are vital in order that a child be enabled to read for meaning:

> *...by making them aware of what are the skills that you are trying to develop. Modelling the strategy that you are trying to teach so that they are aware of what*

they should do and checking that they are doing it. Then explicitly helping them to make the connections... I suppose good readers do it subconsciously. Book reports and discussion about books help to engage them so that their reading for meaning. In SEN I was just amazed that they didn't really understand reading for what it was meant to be. They were so busy struggling with the mechanics of it that the understanding was almost lost. Yes, that the mechanics become the important thing and not the actual reading. The first step in actually getting them to understand what is reading about, what's the story; the story is the written word.

Mari (Class Teacher, School A) teaches the skills of:

Cloze Procedure, they'd be looking at words, they'd be finding words within words and using letters. They would be doing basic comprehension questions, just general questions from the text and finding words within the text and I suppose they'd often be doing little tasks to create their own little piece of writing, very short, very minimal based on something that would have been within the same context as the actual story itself.

Developing higher order thinking processes include higher order skills such as working memory, self-monitoring, inhibition (of irrelevant information), cognitive flexibility and shifting attention are executive functioning skills that are seen as a supporting factors in the learning process and as critical facilitators for core skills such as reading comprehension (Reynor, 2018b). Amanda (Principal, School A) encourages:

…the teachers to actually look at comprehension in anything they are doing, like comprehension; it's in maths, it's in history, it's in geography, it's in everything, and that they need to look at that as they are going along, and to explain.

Madge (Class Teacher, School B) aspiration is:

That they would gain more confidence when they get a piece of text and that they don't get disheartened when they don't understand every single word. You know that they have their little toolbox; their strategies and they can tackle it and give it a go.

Nora (Principal, School A) advocates skill building using:

…the SQ3R method you know which is the scanning, the questioning and the reasoning. We use that method and also I suppose through oral language by trying to get them to retell a story to you.

Joe (Class teacher, School E) detailed a step-by step skills building programme used in his school to teach vocabulary:

> *The first hundred Dolch words are done by the junior infants. We teach the words in isolation first then they're putting them into sentences themselves, orally first and then you're asking them to formulate sentences with the teacher acting as scribe writing these sentences on the board*.

Jane (Class Teacher, School C) recognises that invoking and appealing to the child's prior knowledge of a topic enhances comprehension:

> *If I was trying to teach them the skills that they'd need, I'd be teaching them first to use what they already know and to recall what knowledge they know about this topic already. If it was a certain story about dogs I'd say: "what do you know about dogs already"? or "what pictures to you see in the book now that can help you identify what do you think the story might be about?"*

This data is consistent with the idea that children's reading skills will not improve unless they improve their comprehension skills. Having children experience books, teachers modelling strategies and enabling a child to make connections as well as providing many tasks and activities are all conducive to the development of reading for meaning.

Children learn to read best by reading (Stanovich, 1992) as evidenced in my research and automaticity and speed of reading is delayed in the less skilled reader due to a lack of practice and exposure. The teaching of the necessary skills of comprehension such as understanding, analysis, deduction, summarisation, inference, prediction, confirmation, synthesis and evaluation are also important factors in an inclusive and comprehensive reading programme and in light of this the context is set for the acknowledgement of the simple view of reading (Lerner, 2006). Proponents of single word reading break down the process into knowledge and skills and further development of early reading can be categorised into three distinct phases; the logographic, the alphabetic and the orthographic stages (Frith, 1985). The development of the logographic, early alphabetic, mature alphabetic and orthographic stages in learning to read finally lead to the gaining of fluency (Lerner, 2006). Proposing that the models of reading instruction should be divided into four general approaches: direct instruction, explicit explanation, cognitive apprenticeship, and whole language (Garcia and Pearson, 1991) further sub-divides the teaching of

reading.

These approaches are incorporated in the skills based approach and the meaning-emphasis approach to the teaching of reading. These stages and approaches are inextricably linked in that they should not be viewed as neatly separated or self-contained. When the ultimate goal of reading is considered, which is the understanding or comprehension of what is read, these models help in the discovery of the kinds of information-processing activities that go on in peoples' minds when they read. These models also help in the discovery of the structure and organisation of the cognitive system skilled readers have acquired from learning to read. In order to adopt good inclusive practice my evidence concurs with the advice of Barry (2005) who asserted that teachers need to become more familiar with the intricacies of developmentally appropriate practices. Therefore there is a great need for teachers and educators to have substantial knowledge of the strategies which are most effective for the teaching of literacy in general and especially in the area of reading comprehension to children with SEN as supported by my evidence.

4.5.12 Spelling

There is no causal link from competence in phonological awareness to success in reading and the acquisition of spelling. Phonological awareness precedes and directly influences the process of reading acquisition and it represents a skill specific to spoken language (Castles and Coltheart, 2004). Hence, the importance of teaching letter-sound correspondence enables students to master the alphabetic principle and provides them with a vital tool for acquiring spelling.

One parent, Betty (Parent, School A) identified spelling as a major issue for her child: *'probably the biggest area of concern for him at the moment would be the spelling side of things.'* With regard to her child's literacy progress Lena (Parent, School B) noticed: '*his*

reading went up, but his spellings just seem to stay behind.' One class teacher, Mona (Class Teacher, School D) dislikes the use of weekly tests in spelling: '*I hate this whole thing ... I'm absolutely allergic to the spellings test on a Friday or anything like that, I can't bear it and I think it causes undue stress on everybody*.' Mona recommends: '*the Swist programme where they are working at their own level*.' One principal, Nora (Principal, School A) also recommends:

> *Swist Spellings, where we differentiate spelling, we've differentiated the spelling programme for all the children in my class. In our station teaching one of the stations is on just oral language around the spellings. We found that children are proficient spellers and they can spell words that they may not understand their meaning. We make lists of spelling patterns which can be taken from dictations as well in Brendan Culligan's book, but we work on spelling patterns, those spelling patterns would be taken from the various tests we do at the end of the year, so therefore children who are making similar mistakes are put together in a group*.

These findings reveal that the use of weekly spelling tests is not a strategy that teachers enjoy applying.

4.5.13 Use of Technology

Three class teachers, one principal and one parent considered the use of technology as valuable for children. Lena (Parent, School B) advised:

> *He likes computer games a lot. It's good because he has to learn the rules before he can play the game so that gets him reading... it mightn't be very intellectual reading, but he's still reading something... it's real reading.*

Madge (Class Teacher, School B) speaking of a pupil with SEN observed: '*there are lots of games as well, reading comprehension strategy games that they can go on, and he loves that*.' Mona (Class Teacher, School D) explains how she uses technology as an aid to comprehension:

> *We did the stories of historical characters and the children were fascinated by them. I digitally recorded the children interviewing other children acting as the historical characters and each child made an e-portfolio so that at the end of the year they had a very rich literature portfolio leaving me that's digitally recorded as well. I'd be aware of different types of learners so for a visual learner I'd be very*

aware of having the interactive whiteboard as a resource also.

John (Principal, School C) endorses the use of apps but highlights a caveat:

> *Specific apps like "Teddy the team teacher" would be specifically directed for SEN children but we're aware as well that we don't like to have them on the i Pad all the time; it's just another educational resource for them.*

Joe (Class Teacher, School E) reveals:

> *We've lots of computer programmes in the SEN room and the classroom such as Word Shark and there are some to help you create your own stories. The child picks the context, the characters that are there, and the computer will generate a story for them and they read it back. They have picked everything to do with the story and then they are reading the whole story back... that in itself is comprehension. They are writing it themselves, that's done mainly with children with SEN.*

It is possible to hypothesise therefore, that the use of ICT and technology promotes the development of reading comprehension.

4.5.14 Use of Drama, Story and Large Format Books

One special education teacher, Carrie (SET, School D) encourages pupils with SEN to dramatise stories to aid comprehension:

> *Through acting I get them to read more fluently, like using tones, different tones. I often say pretend you're reading a story to a younger child, you don't use a robot voice, you don't want them to fall asleep.'*

Further to this, one class teacher, Joe (Class Teacher, School E) suggests:

> *Using the fairy tale stories then acting out the stories. There's a saying "if you see, do and or act out something you remember ninety percent of something". So they are acting, they are hearing it read, they are reading it themselves independently and they're acting it out to get meaning from it.*

It is therefore likely that connections exist between the use of drama and developing comprehension.

One special education teacher, Sheila (SET, School E) uses the large format book as a

resource for teaching literacy and outlines the importance of the reading-writing link:

> *I teach it to the whole class. On Monday we go through the language, the story, what do they think about it. Then they go to the listening centre. They have the same small format book as the big book. We put the story on the tapes and they're going through the book themselves and turning the pictures and getting the sense of the story. Then we have a writing activity following on from that. It could be sentences, word banks, cloze procedure, so you are reinforcing the language of that large format book and on all the focus words as well. The following day they were doing some sort of unaided writing to do with the large format book and I find this is where some people don't follow that through. I link up the writing with the reading. If they've had the experience of reading the large format book, then they had the language and they know the vocabulary, they know the story. Then they do some sort of writing activity differentiated depending on the child's need. They've got a word bank there and they can do it, they have enough skills. My SEN children may still be on CVC's would do their writing using a word bank and a writing frame and they would then be able to reinforce the vocabulary. Children like it and it does work because the actual rate of writing progress is immensely more than if you just did a reading activity or a cloze procedure.*

This observation supports the use of large format books as an aid to teaching all the elements of reading.

Processes that allow readers to continuously modify and update their current comprehension enable pupils to demonstrate skilled comprehension ability by portraying immediate use of word meanings in the integration process (Perfetti and Stafura, 2014). Two parents, two special education teachers, one acting principal and one class teacher use story as an aid to teaching comprehension strategies. Carrie (SET, School D) suggests:

> *I would look at the cover of the book first of all and ask them what they think this is about and look at the illustration, look at the title, get some children to suggest what they think the story is about. Then I read the story and we would make connections. I try to enable them to interpret and reconcile the content of the story, so they can show that by drawing a picture, they can show it by orally retelling or by writing down answers to questions that I ask.*

Lena (Parent, School B) endorses the value of bedtime stories: '*maybe three nights a week they'd have a bedtime story.*' Lorna (SET, School C) found that the use of story develops many literacy skills:

> *They improve their skills when they are able to retell the story and making sure that*

> *they are able to pick out what are the most important parts when they are summarising. Being able to paraphrase it in their own words improves their reading skills*.

Orla (Parent, School D) describes strategies that she was taught by a private tutor that she employs to work with her child outside of school:

> *What I use at the moment are short stories and I get him to read the short story. I get him to put a sheet of paper under each paragraph that just shows a small block of text. Just showing a small bit of text at a given time is good so that his head isn't bamboozled with all of this text on a whole page. He can just focus on the paragraph that is relevant and we go on bit by bit. Then we go back and I get him to tell me what the story is about. I ask him the different questions so then I know he understands the story. I use prompts cards for the questions with question words like what, where, when, why, how and so forth. Then I get him to draw out the pictures from the story in sequence. He then sees the story in pictures as well and that's working and also he completely understands what it is about.*

Mags (Acting Principal, School D) associates exposure to good literature and development of reading skills:

> *Children have to be encouraged to read but for them to be encouraged to read they have to see reading and they have to be exposed to good literature and to books that they may not read themselves. Therefore the class teacher has a huge role to play by reading books to them that children might not read themselves. I think a lot of children have good vocabulary for speaking but they have very poor book vocabulary and that has to be taught... and that's where you'll get that vocabulary...in a book.*

Mona (Class Teacher, School D) warns of the importance of enjoyment for children: '*once the phonics, the sight words. the fluency is in place and once there's a good level of reading achieved then they have to enjoy the story*.' Teresa (SET, School C) advises teaching one reading comprehension strategy per term using a story:

> *For one term they may have worked on a strategy with the support of the teacher, that whole idea of the gradual release of responsibility, using the picture book and stories initially as a whole class and then working towards implementing the strategy themselves when they were working on their reading*.

The gradual release of responsibility **(**Pearson and Gallagher, 1983) consisting of providing plenty of opportunities to practically apply the new methodology and plenty opportunity for dialogue and reflection. Teachers and students working collaboratively using the

specific reading strategies outlined in the above extracts are proposed to promote students improved efficacy with reading comprehension of nonfiction text and highlights the importance of metacognition.

Jane (Class Teacher, School C) described how this was incorporated into station teaching in School C: '*we had a table for new reading, then we had a table for writing about the story that they had done and then there was a table for listening to the story.'*

According to this data we can deduce that enabling children to interpret and reconcile the content of a story, summarise, re-tell and expose children to good literature aids comprehension. Ensuring that they have a good basis in phonological awareness, a rich sight vocabulary and many comprehension building strategies is a pre-requisite for good understanding to occur.

All of the above evidence concurs with the notion that teachers need to be adequately and appropriately prepared to effectively teach reading comprehension. In an outline of the factors which lead to improvement in this area they highlight teacher proficiency in the use of a range of word-recognition strategies and the appropriate use of higher level questioning skills. This can only be achieved by the effective preparation of teachers in their endeavours to meet all the challenges encountered by children when they are faced with obstacles and barriers to comprehension when they are reading (Taylor et al, 2002).

4.5.15 Whole School Organisation and Development of Policy

On principal, Amanda (Principal, School B) outlined whole school organisation as an important factor in the development of reading comprehension in her school:

> *You have to allow time in the timetable to put an emphasis on reading comprehension and we'd have staff discussions to gain consensus as to how we are going to go about this and if something wasn't working, we'd review it, or if something was working we'd maybe expand on it.*

Whilst class teacher, Joe (Class Teacher, School E) affirms the practice of teachers meeting regularly to plan for teaching and organise the delivery of the literacy curriculum:

> *As well as the weekly meeting that we had we also had a meeting informally every morning just say we're doing this and this and how did the children get on yesterday with that. Officially every Thursday after school we met for half an hour and we planned everything out for the week. We picked our comprehensions for different classes and for withdrawing students with SEN. So we picked them together, planning and doing it properly allowed us not to miss anything, not to overlook anything and the most important thing was not to overlook anyone and the way we were structuring the lessons meant that every child was going to get a chance to answer a different question. We would go as far as to write a child's name and the exact question we were going to ask for the children with SEN, so that they would understand what we were doing, what we were about to do, and so they would have a chance to speak in front of the class as well and boost their confidence.*

This evidence signifies the need for whole school collaboration and planning.

One principal, Amanda (Principal, School B) asserted that inclusive practice is at the core of the policy:

> *Our main policy for English would of course include children with special education needs and as part of this we have reading comprehension teaching. Children with special education needs would be totally provided for because they would always be working at their ability level. We'd have a staff discussion following assessments at end of the year. We'd check out what areas the children were falling down in and then we'd work on those for the following year.*

Another principal, Nora (Principal, School A) disclosed: '*I'd like to think that we have an inclusive overall programme in the school but don't have an explicit reading comprehension programme.'* One special education teacher, Sheila (SET, School E) revealed that policy formulation was driven by the needs of the pupils:

> *In first and second class I team teach with the deputy principal and following completing a course we did a lot of thinking about our literacy, how it wasn't meeting the needs of our children. So we needed to change our teaching of reading. We found out it has worked, we evaluated as we've gone along and used our test results and we've seen a marked improvement in children's literacy scores and their reading ages have improved.*

In light of this evidence, it is reasonable to surmise that development of whole-school policy is at the heart of embracing the development of reading comprehension programmes which leads to the reader, text and activity interrelated in dynamic ways that vary across pre-reading, reading and post-reading (RAND Reading Study Group (RRSG), 2002). This concept was prioritised in the context of my research. My evidence highlights the significant patterns among the different case schools in this area of the research. The combination of pedagogy, practice and perception is a theory of what matters in learning to comprehend when reading as it assumes that reading is a social as well as an individual practice, interactive as well as cognitive and multi-sited as well as happening 'in school'.

I will leave the final word with Sheila, SET, School E:

> *I've come through it because I'm so old. I've been through so much of the reading development from Look and Say to Phonics, to Letter Land, to real books emergent readers. There seems to be every few years research that comes out that disproves other methods. I think you have to be sensible, take on board what the research says, sometimes take it with a pinch of salt, but be open to it. You have to be open to the new progress, you haven't got all the answers, old methods are not always the best, and I think you have to be sufficiently humble to say this sounds great, let's give it a go, or to say I'm not happy with my teaching, I'm not happy with the end result. These children can bark at print but they don't enjoy reading, they wouldn't pick up a book for pleasure and I think that's up to us to enthuse it, so I think you have to keep abreast of everything and your methodology has to be matched to your children and it's up to the teacher to change, that's your job as an expert, you enthuse children to be able to want to read, and there's a purpose for it, and that's your skill and doesn't matter whether you go through a newspaper, football cards, whatever it is you have to do to get these children to read and to enjoy it, and reading for purpose, I think that's what you do, and whatever new research comes out, look at it, up skill yourself and keep an open mind and use it, but don't be a slave, don't throw the baby out with the bath water. I think that's a kind of a balanced approach to it, but I do love to read the research from the various universities that come out because if they have done a study there's a basis behind it, and that's really important, so you're never too old to learn.*

Such advice coming from a dedicated teacher with years of experience cannot be overlooked.

4.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, in this chapter I framed the discussion around the meta-themes; pedagogy, practice and perceptions that emerged from my data analysis. I drew connections between these and my original literature review to identify themes, similarities/tensions, developments and my new discoveries and contributions: whilst monitoring how these linked to the other themes of the models of reading and to my research questions. I presented and discussed the data so that I was enabled to draw meaningful conclusions from it which responded to the aims of my research. I re-presented my research questions, justified them in relation to the literature, presented the data and discussed the significance of it by ascertaining whether it confirmed or challenged what was presented in the literature. I delved into the meaning, importance and relevance of my results, focusing on evaluating and explaining what I found and showing how it related to my literature review and research questions thus formulating an argument in support of my overall conclusion that will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will provide an introductory restatement of the research problem, aims and research question. I will assess the value, relevance and implications of the key findings of my study in light of existing studies and literature. A summary of findings and limitations of the study that may affect the validity or the generalisability of results will be included. I will outline practical applications and implications for theory, practice and further research and make claims for new knowledge and contribution to knowledge in the area of teaching reading to children with SEN in mainstream schools. I will outline how my new model of teaching reading to children with SEN will make a contribution to practicing classroom teachers. I will also include what a programme for in-service training in SEN for practicing mainstream classroom teachers should entail, as well as formulating a programme that would help parents in the home context. Finally I will address the area of positionality and provide a reflexive account.

The purpose of the current study was to explore how the teaching of reading comprehension is supported in the development of literacy skills in the mainstream school setting in the Irish context where children presenting with SEN are included. The hope is that my research will enable teachers to adapt their pedagogical practice to support inclusion of such children (Lynch, 2007; Ní Bhroin, 2017), as educational research provides an insight into what directs action in policy development and teaching (Edwards, 2002). The possible impact of bridging the gap between research and practice according to McIntyre (2005) results in the development of knowledge-creating schools in the area of reading difficulties that children with SEN experience. This link between professional practice (in the classroom coupled with supporting parents in the home context) and research underpins the role of enquiry in this study and enhances the professional

development of principal teachers, mainstream class teachers and special education teachers. In this chapter, I will illustrate a new model of the reading process that will support children with SEN in the mainstream classroom. I will position my new research against existing knowledge.

The overarching aim of the research, to build a picture of the system of teaching reading comprehension (at both home and school) as it currently exists in order to interpret its strengths and challenges according to principal teachers, mainstream class teachers, learning support teachers and parents of children with SEN – and, ultimately, enable principals, teachers and parents to adapt their pedagogical practice to support inclusion of such children was achieved through an exploration of the following questions:

- What is the current practice in the teaching of reading comprehension in literacy skills for children with SEN included in mainstream schools?
- What strategies support the development of reading comprehension skills within the context of home based literacy?
- What pedagogical intervention strategies are classified as best practice by schools?
- Which strategies work best for children with SEN in the classroom?
- How do teachers currently assess reading comprehension?
- How does this assessment of reading comprehension inform their teaching?

Teachers are continuously faced with challenges in translating policy into practice. Issues such as large class size, teaching multiple classes and time constraints have been identified in my research as major barriers to facilitating curricular access. As a result many challenges unfold as schools endeavour to facilitate curricular access for pupils with SEN. The following elements in relation to both parental perspectives and school perspectives were identified in the study. Parental perspectives highlighted the following themes: Child's Attitude to Reading, Courses for Parents, Homework, Needs Identified by Parents, Parental Input, Parental Involvement, Reading Ability, Reading Programme Provision and

Support from School. Hannon (1995) notes the importance of involving parents in literacy teaching but recognises that the theoretical understandings of why and how to do it has often lagged behind practice. Therefore, the case for parental involvement, based on results of research into literacy development and home learning should be persuasively argued and a theoretical framework to underpin practice put forward. In relation to this, an important element of my research was identifying strategies that foster and develop reading comprehension skills not only within the inclusive school setting but also within the context of home based literacy. Strategies such as summarisation, cooperative learning, graphic and semantic organisers, story structure, question answering, question generation and comprehension monitoring all improve reading comprehension (McKeown et al., 2009).

In conducting my research, I found that provision, practice and curriculum cannot be separated but remain interwoven within the fabric of everyday classroom life. Years of integration (which is a new term in addition to placement and inclusion) have been endured with limited investment with hidden costs. This is not only about pedagogies, practices and perceptions now but also about politics (Cosgrove et al., 2014).

Originality in my project was achieved through formulation a new model of teaching reading to children with SEN, identifying the need for provision of in-service training for mainstream class teachers in SEN and reading and proposing what modules this training should entail as well as identifying the need for provision of training for parents and also outlining what this training should include. Parents need to be taught skills to enable them to help their child with literacy at home. Parents also need support to help them to come to terms with their child's difficulty when their child had been diagnosed with having a learning difficulty. This is my new addition to the existing literature. It is my hope that it

will frame future discussion and dialogue regarding best practice moving forward for children with SEN.

5.2 Implications for Practice

5.2.1 Proposing a New Model of Teaching Reading to Children with SEN

My main contribution to the theory is proposing a new model of teaching reading to children with SEN in the mainstream classroom. By examining the theoretical approaches to the reading process (the skills-based approach, the meaning emphasis approach and the simple view) and their application in schools, I have ascertained that certain schools used some components of some approaches, however, not all of them used all of the approaches. My model proposes a model for best practice formulated in light of current and relevant literature and it is evidence based from the perspectives of the school and home based on their particular needs. My proposed model will assist teachers to fine-tune their teaching and enable them to adapt their pedagogical skills to support the inclusion of children with SEN. The skills-based approach stresses the importance of teaching children the skills necessary for decoding and interpreting text in order that they will at a later stage, be enabled to comprehend what they are reading as naming speed, decoding, and language were uniquely associated with reading fluency (Barth et al., 2009).

As there has been few quantitative studies of how to help children who can read accurately (in the sense of decoding fluently) but who appear not to understand much of what they read, it can be deduced that children's comprehension skills are benefited most by being directly targeted, and not indirectly through work on reading accuracy (Brooks, 2002). Teaching students strategies, such as predicting what might happen next, as an aid to reading comprehension is relatively more effective than other methods (Swanson and Hoskyn, 1998). It is of great importance that children should be given the opportunity to review and recall their prior knowledge of the subject matter of the text so that they will be

able to survey and predict what knowledge they might gain from it. Viewing comprehension more as a connective activity and less as construction enables the reader to reconcile information and interpret it in a way which is more holistic. Including the triangle model ensures that reading is the outcome of a process that involves interactions between the sounds of words, their spellings and their meanings (Adams, 1990) and encompassing the dual-route model proposes the two different processes for converting print to speech that skilled readers have at their disposal (Coltheart, 1978).

Table 5.1 illustrates my new model of SEN delivery and its implications for practice in schools. It contains the components of my proposed new model of teaching reading to children with SEN, provision of in-service training for mainstream class teachers in SEN, provision of training for parents as well as outlining the components in leadership for learning. This will be followed by a thorough explanation of the contents of the table. Table 5.2 illustrates the integration of the components of the theoretical models of reading contained in A New Model of SEN Delivery. It draws from the Skills-Based Approach, the Meaning-Emphasis Approach, the Simple View, the Dual Route Model and the Triangle Model as shown in the table. The elements of the programme outlines the skills derived from each of the models that the pupils will be enabled to develop in order to enhance their literacy skills.

Table 5.1: A New Model of SEN Delivery - Implications for Practice

A New Model of SEN Delivery - Implications for Practice	
Components	**Elements of Programme**
A New Model of Teaching Reading to Children with SEN	• Pedagogical Implications for Best Practice in Reading Comprehension Teaching • Translation into Classroom Practice • The Development of Sight Vocabulary • Development of Reading Fluency • Development of Oral Language • The Development of Phonological Awareness • The Practice of Shared Reading
In-service Training for Mainstream Class Teachers in SEN	• Enabling Teachers to develop the Skills and Strategies for effective Teaching of Reading • Reading Ability
Training for Parents	• Addressing the needs Identified by Parents • Development of Courses for Parents • Supporting Parental Involvement
Leadership for Learning	• Whole School Development Planning • The Role of Curriculum Planning and Teacher Preparation • Record Keeping • Planning for Individual Needs • Developing Inclusive Assessment Practices • Supporting Identification of Reading Difficulties • Enabling Inclusive Classroom Practice • Supporting Differentiation • Learning Support Provision • Team Teaching • Tools to Support Learning • The Child's Learning Experience • Development of a Positive Attitude to Reading Development • School Self-Evaluation to enable Inclusion • The Teaching Experience • Curriculum Implementation • Informal and Formal Assessment

Table 5.2: Integration of the components of the Theoretical Models of Reading contained in A New Model of SEN Delivery

Integration of the components of the Theoretical Models of Reading contained in A New Model of SEN Delivery	
Theoretical Models of Reading	**Elements of Programme**
The Skills Based Approach	Makes sense of the smaller components of the language (letters) and then progressing to larger components (sounds, words and sentences). Enabling children to learn to read by decoding the language.
The Meaning Emphasis Approach	Emphasis on whole word reading regardless of sound patterns. Emphasis on meaning-making.
The Simple View	Incorporates decoding and language comprehension. Understanding the meaning of words necessary for reading comprehension.
The Dual Route Model	Whole word method combined with phonological awareness.
The Triangle Model	The phonological and orthographic processors work together to decode unfamiliar words. The context processor then provides support to the meaning processor to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words. The orthographic processor processes information from the visual sequence of letters to form words. The orthographic processor is the direct, visual route to reading and a sight vocabulary. The phonological processor enables information from letter sound correspondence to form words. Phonological processing involves assembling sounds to form words.

Within the Irish context, the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) outlines that there are three strands in the curriculum; oral language, reading and writing. Across these three strands, the elements describe essential language learning. In turn each element has a set of Learning Outcomes which outline important language learning in terms of dispositions, skills and concepts. The elements of the language learning in each of the strands are:

1. Development communicative relationships through language
2. Understanding the context and structure of language
3. Exploring and using language

Within the Primary Language Curriculum (2019), the strands and elements although outlined, are not referred to as models of reading. However the strategies that are outlined within the context of the strands and elements and learning outcomes would align with the model that I have produced. While the curriculum only outlines strands, elements and learning outcomes, however, when I examined these components that are suggested in the curriculum, they fall within the new model of SEN delivery that I have outlined above. The Primary Language Curriculum (2019) is designed for the mainstream classroom and my study is based within the context of mainstream classroom teaching. My model extracts elements from the theoretical models of reading outlined in this thesis and integrates them in one coherent form, drawing on best practice as outlined by the participants in the study. I have generated a model that is based on my findings and as a proposal for future research and this model could be tested to ascertain if it is generalisable across contexts.

Pedagogical Implications for Best Practice in Reading Comprehension Teaching

My model identifies the pedagogical implications for best practice in reading comprehension teaching. Embracing elements of the models of reading and drawing them together into one coherent framework as outlined in my model would enable teachers to

apply them in their classrooms this is my contribution to the field of education. Rather than teachers having to acquire knowledge about the complex models of reading, my model incorporates the elements that were evidenced in my research to be the most effective in one comprehensive single document. This would make the teaching of reading comprehension to children with SEN a simpler task for teachers, as all of the elements of the teaching of reading comprehension that they would need to employ in a mainstream classroom situation are contained in my model. This decreases the need for teachers to examine many different strategies from the many different models. Contained in my model are all of the strategies that my participants have found to be the most effective so this evidence is extrapolated directly from my findings.

The effectiveness of teaching reading comprehension strategies is critically important in the development of children's reading skills and as an aid to understanding what they are reading (The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). My research identified best practice in the area of reading comprehension teaching and identified which strategies work best for children presenting with SEN in the classroom. Strategies such as selection of appropriate material at the instructional and interest level of the child, employing a variety of questioning skills, planning, assessing, reviewing and providing time for consolidation and review of material are all necessary. Effective readers need to be competent in the following components of reading; phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. These components provide a balanced approach to the teaching of reading, integrating the skills-based approach and the meaning-emphasis approach. This in turn will have a positive influence on the development of the reading-writing link (Ruddell, 2002). The presence of weak vocabulary skills lead to impaired development in word reading ability and weak general cognitive ability leads to impaired advancement in comprehension (Cain and Oakhill, 2006). It might seem that

good pedagogical skills alone are sufficient in the teaching of reading and comprehension instruction however, other effective classroom practices are also necessary.

Translation into Classroom Practice

Implementing a variety of practices, including the provision of appropriate materials, resources, programmes and schemes as well as implementing a variety of assessment techniques are all conducive to best practice. If reading comprehension is an active process that requires an intentional and thoughtful interaction between the reader and the text (Lerner, 2006) in the school context the reader should be enabled to bridge the gap that exists between what they are reading and the knowledge which they already possess in order to make sense of it. Tasks that measure how new information is reconciled with information already stored in long-term memory is a better predictor of reading comprehension measured with the text available than working memory tasks that only have a short-term memory element (Goff et al., 2005).

The comprehension of reading depends on what the reader brings to the written material by way of experience, knowledge of language and recognition of syntactic structure (Lerner, 2006). This can be enhanced through effective classroom practice. Within the Irish context, the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (2008) also concurs with this by asserting that comprehension is the construction of meaning from printed material that requires the use of background knowledge, which the reader brings, in conjunction with the material that is found on the printed page. This can be enabled by the development of sight vocabulary.

The Development of Sight Vocabulary

Vocabulary development should include provision of both explicit and incidental teaching and learning of words, instruction in word-learning strategies, providing repeated exposure to words that have been already learned thus enabling children to access new words in different contexts, selecting words used frequently for instruction and encouraging active pupil/teacher dialogue and engagement with words (Reynor, 2014).The development of sight vocabulary is a vital component in the acquisition of reading skills and a lack in vocabulary development is a mitigating factor in the development of comprehension. Weak comprehenders show reduced development in vocabulary compared to the better comprehenders (Cain and Oakhill, 2011).Understanding word meanings and applying prior knowledge and extending vocabulary is necessary as is the implementation of effective strategies such as compiling word walls and using picture cues as an aid to vocabulary development. These approaches acknowledge awareness of the development of a conceptual knowledge of the nature of written language and its relationship to the spoken word and thus helps to foster the development of reading comprehension (Frith, 1985). It is necessary for a child to have a knowledge of how print functions, the form of print and the realisation that spoken words can be broken down into sounds or phonemes. By combining semantic and syntactic information about words stored in long-term memory with local information about the sentence context, information can be contextualised in working memory (Kintsch and Mangalath, 2011). The skills-based approach stresses the importance of teaching children the skills necessary for decoding and interpreting text in order that they will at a later stage, be enabled to comprehend what they are reading (Kelly, 2008). Thus it develops comprehension skills and strategies to facilitate the processing of texts. In my research I identified the necessary strategies; understanding, analysis, deduction, summarisation, inference, prediction, confirmation, synthesis and evaluation that teachers are currently using in order to enable their pupils with SEN to develop reading

comprehension skills. This enables teachers to differentiate the curriculum. In relation to reading comprehension acquisition, processes including higher order skills such as working memory, self-monitoring, inhibition (of irrelevant information), cognitive flexibility and shifting attention are seen as supporting factors in the learning process and as critical facilitators for core skills such as reading comprehension (Reynor, 2018b).

This simple view of reading places emphasis on the role of spoken language i.e. vocabulary. This is important because the simple view of reading provides a valid conceptual framework placing emphasis on language comprehension processes and on word recognition processes as essential components during the development of reading and in skilled reading (Hoover and Gough, 1990). The significance of oral vocabulary, to reading comprehension, decoding and visual word recognition, suggests that a model may be required to justify these complex relationships across development (Ouellette and Beers, 2010) and this is proposed in my model. In essence, in order to comprehend the content of a written text, the learner reader must firstly learn to recognise or decode the words on a page. 'Decoding' and 'comprehension' are the two components of the 'simple view of reading'. By 'decoding' the child learns the ability to 'decode' or recognise words which are presented singly and out of the context of a sentence. To this end the application of phonic rules is a necessary contributing factor in the development of word recognition ability which is context free. The simple view is useful to practitioners in that the clear differentiation between the two dimensions provides a framework that makes explicit that different types of teaching are needed to develop word recognition skills from those that are needed to develop the comprehension of spoken and written language. However, from my research I learned that this in itself is not sufficient to enable children with SEN to read fluently as some teachers in my study evidenced that the methodology that they find best is a combination of models.

Development of Reading Fluency

Difficulties in reading fluency contributes to the presence of reading difficulties (Rasinski et al., 2009). In contrast to the skills-based approach the cognitive apprenticeship model (Collins et al, 1989) is based on constructivist ideas about learning and it focuses not so much on the acquisition of basic knowledge and skills, but on the process of learning and on more complex skills and metacognitive skills such as those involved in comprehending text. This model suggests that reading is the orchestration of complex processes and should be used in schools. Teaching these complex processes such as the cognitive activities involved in reading, in a skill by skill, fashion creates a distorted view of the reading process therefore limiting comprehension (Brown et al., 1989). Due to the over-reliance on the acquisition of skills alone, enjoyment of reading may be lost as a child struggles to decipher the text on a page without extracting any real meaning, thus comprehension is compromised and not conducive to inclusion (King, 2006). Therefore, it is also necessary to incorporate elements of the meaning-emphasis approach as well to support reading comprehension acquisition.

Development of Oral Language

The development of a social skills and sight vocabulary, providing time for discussion, development of sequencing and ordering skills and use of the child's own language experience are all conducive to the development of oral language. Direct-instruction proponents assume that reading can be decomposed into identifiable sub skills that, when taught directly, will improve children's reading ability (Stahl, 1997). Direct instruction programmes are most effective when they are used in conjunction with wide reading thus enhancing comprehension (Meyer, 1983). In breaking down language into components that are taught in isolation the direct instruction approach therefore does not enhance the

learning of reading within its meaningful context hence comprehension is also compromised.

In applying the direct instruction model, the learner becomes better able to use a particular strategy, then their use of that strategy while reading will become automatic (Kameenui et al., 1997). However, it should be noted that children presenting with SEN often encounter great difficulty in making this transfer (Ott, 1997). The emphasis on practising the strategy in the context of reading the text is therefore a strength of the explicit explanation model as it leads the pupil along the continuum from the responsibility for using the strategy lying with the teacher to the pupil independently using the strategy themselves; it is therefore a more inclusive model. This approach presents a contrasting approach to the whole language or meaning-emphasis approach which advocates that oral language is learned without direct instruction because it serves a purpose for the learner (Keene and Zimmermann, 2007). This purpose is the enhancement of comprehension. In explicit explanation the gradual release from teacher to pupil of the responsibility for the execution of a strategy consolidates a deeper "ownership" of the use of the strategy and as a result comprehension is better enhanced. In practice the cognitive-apprenticeship models share many components with whole-language instruction in that they both treat the task of reading holistically and are therefore inclusive models; they do not teach sub-skills in isolation. In the teaching of reading, isolating a strategy often distorts it, making it difficult to use in "real" reading thus comprehension is restricted (Hall, 2003). The meaning-emphasis approach stresses that reading should be a thinking process and driven 'top-down' by a search for meaning in which different cue-systems are orchestrated (Goodman, 1967). Peer-tutoring for reading fluency is an appropriate model for the classroom organisation of a shared reading programme that incorporates the meaning-emphasis approach an the simple-view.

The Development of Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness precedes and directly influences the process of learning to read and it represents a skill that is specific to spoken language (Castles and Coltheart, 2004). Decoding skills alone are not conducive to developing understanding and comprehension and this can be enhanced by the use of a station teaching model where developing phonological awareness can be addressed in the context of real reading. However, in order to enhance comprehension, this short, focused delivery of phonics teaching as outlined in the 'simple view' should take place within the context of reading and not through words presented singly out of context as this task is often a major challenge for children especially those children presenting with SEN. Over-reliance on phonics teaching without sufficient cognisance of language experience creates little progress in the area of comprehension (Goodman, 1967) as poor comprehenders present with poor language scores (Catts et al., 2006). While decoding skills may enable comprehension, they do not however, ensure it. Word recognition (decoding) is influenced by a pupil's knowledge of words and language. The ability to score well in automatic naming and phonological awareness tests predicts reading in the English language throughout the initial school years and the early consideration of these variables are more diagnostic than measured when pupils are older (Cronin, 2011).The use of appropriate programmes and schemes can be of great benefit to develop this such as the practice of shared reading.

The Practice of Shared Reading

The practice of shared reading is a practice that is conducive to the development of reading skills both from the school and home contexts and can complement the meaning-emphasis approach. Kenneth Goodman (1967) described reading as a psycholinguistic guessing game in which skilled readers use their knowledge of language (vocabulary and syntax) together with knowledge of the topic, to predict many of the words on the page, thus enabling the development of comprehension. This ability to predict is an important element

in comprehension which is highly interactive and reciprocal in its nature. As this is the way in which skilled readers operate, this approach advocates the need for even beginning readers and especially pupils with SEN to learn to use the same ‘guess-from-meaning’ strategy. A key belief underpinning this approach is that children learn to read in much the same way as they learned to use speech to communicate. In this context it is only when meaning is lost that the reader resorts to the phonic principle. Reading and cognitive profiles of children with dyslexia highlight the continuing need for a focus on the development of language skills as phonological difficulties, reading comprehension and language skills are a recurring challenge for those children (Reynor, 2018a).

The psycholinguists 'cue systems' model (Goodman, 1967) underpins a 'whole language' perspective. The strength of shared reading lies in its recognition of the broader view of reading. While in shared reading, the recognition that words and letters are still important does not dismiss the other information which children bring to reading and encompasses the need for comprehension development in a holistic fashion. Not all models of the reading process conducted by teachers in my research adopted knowledge and skills versus the meaning-emphasis approach and many espoused to the interweaving of the two approaches. Finding the best match between the epistemology of an approach and the best understanding of the nature of reading instruction was not easy for the schools that participated in my study. This point is important to the understanding of my study, as it acknowledged that comprehension teaching can be conducted within a meaningful context using strategies which incorporate the meaning-emphasis approach to reading and this was ascertained by asking teachers how they addressed the issue of using comprehension strategies to encourage successful reading in the inclusive classroom.

The interweaving of the semantic, syntactic and grapho-phonic cue-systems brings the disciplines of psychology and linguistics together in the meaning-emphasis approach to the

teaching of reading. Early-emerging language problems that may be present before reading develops include challenges in processing grammatical information in spoken language, deficient performance on general measures of language comprehension and weak vocabulary knowledge (Hulme and Snowling, 2011). If reading is much more than just the decoding of black marks upon a page then it is a quest for meaning and one which requires the reader to be an active participant (Cox, 1991). Assimilating phonic (sound and spelling) knowledge; grammatical knowledge; word recognition and graphic knowledge; and knowledge of context seeks to incorporate the whole complexity of reading thus comprehension is enhanced.

However, one must remain aware of the progress made in the understanding of each components' usefulness in informing the practice of teaching. It is necessary that these components are an integral part of any reading programme, otherwise its effectiveness might be compromised (Washtell, 2008). A whole language approach involves the implementation of the meaning-emphasis approach as well and in order to support this, providing real literature and books is very important for children. A child's reading development is enhanced in many ways when the whole language approach is skilfully implemented (Pressley, 1998). This embodies many teaching strategies such as reading good literature to students every day and providing real literature and books. Providing time for shared reading (Holdaway, 1979) within a class context is good for children. Parents are also advised to establish a good "bed-time routine" for children involving the reading of a story thus enhancing literacy skills. Devotion to the activity of shared book reading in the home, positively impacts emergent literacy and also has a positive influence on the development of word recognition skills (Evans and Shaw, 2008). Within my research I found the extent to which parents felt enabled to assist their children with the development of reading comprehension skills was minimal. I previously discussed the importance of including parents in section 5.1.

5.2.2 Provision of In-service Training for Mainstream Class Teachers in SEN

This study identified from interview data the need for mainstream class teachers to avail of up-skilling in SEN methodologies so that they would be enabled to appropriately support children with SEN in their classrooms and equip them with the skills for effective teaching of reading. Factors which would address this relates to issues of personal and professional development. It is essential, to the successful implementation of present policy that properly structured modules on special education be made available to all mainstream class teachers as well as opportunities for coaching and mentoring. As a principal teacher and from my research findings it is my suggestion that these modules should include:

- relevant background information on the aetiology and types of disability
- education in testing and the techniques of diagnostic assessment
- classroom planning which is appropriate for the child with special needs and managing Individual Education Plans (IEPs)
- adaptation of existing methodology
- aspects of curriculum differentiation
- multi-professional collaboration and
- education in all professional areas which are necessary to assist teachers to adequately meet the needs of the pupils in their class.

Enabling Teachers to develop the Skills and Strategies for effective Teaching of Reading

Children's reading skills will not improve unless they improve their comprehension skills (Graham, 2008). Having children experience books, teachers modelling strategies and enabling a child to make connections as well as providing many tasks and activities are all conducive to the development of reading for meaning. Children learn to read best by reading (Stanovich, 1992) and automaticity and speed of reading is delayed in the less skilled reader due to a lack of practice and exposure. The teaching of the necessary skills of comprehension such as understanding, analysis, deduction, summarisation, inference, prediction, confirmation, synthesis and evaluation are important factors in an inclusive and

comprehensive reading programme and in light of this the context is set for the acknowledgement of the 'simple view' of reading (Lerner, 2006).

Teachers need to become more familiar with the intricacies of developmentally appropriate practices (Barry, 2005). Therefore there is a great need for teachers and educators to have substantial knowledge of the strategies which are most effective for the teaching of literacy in general and especially in the area of reading comprehension to children with SEN. The use of weekly spelling tests are not beneficial for children and differentiated spelling programmes should be employed and teachers should be aware of these. The use of ICT and technology promotes the development of reading comprehension and connections exist between the use of drama and developing comprehension. The use of large format books supports teaching all the elements of reading. Enabling children to interpret and reconcile the content of a story, summarise, re-tell and expose children to good literature aids comprehension. Ensuring that they have a good basis in phonological awareness, a rich sight vocabulary and many comprehension building strategies is a pre-requisite for good understanding to occur. While some poor comprehenders can appear to be adequate readers and have good phonological recoding skills many still reveal difficulty in reading irregular words (Nation and Snowling, 1998a). Also, some children appear, superficially at least, to read well, and serious reading and language impairments are not always obvious in children who have a good ability to decode phonologically (Nation et al., 2004). Teachers need to be adequately and appropriately prepared to effectively teach reading comprehension. Teacher proficiency in the use of a range of word-recognition strategies and the appropriate use of higher level questioning skills is necessary. This can only be achieved by the effective preparation of teachers in their endeavours to meet all the challenges encountered by children when they are faced with obstacles and barriers to comprehension when they are reading (Taylor et al., 2002).

Reading Ability

My evidence, gathered from parents, teachers and children regarding reading ability, confirmed that some children, when unable to read, employ different coping strategies in order not to be 'found out' and dislike reading in class and reading aloud. Inability to integrate phonics and laboriously having to 'sound out' words hinders comprehension, while lack of differentiated material that is selected according to the need of the child also hinders progress. The potential of early comprehension instruction can help develop narrative meaning-making in listening comprehension (Paris and Paris, 2007).

The development of a reading programme for children with SEN, which considers the difficulty which they may experience with transfer of learning and generalisation of skills, needs an integrated and inclusive approach. Whilst a lot a testing of comprehension occurs, instruction in comprehension pedagogy (teaching) is lacking (Eilers and Pinkley, 2006). This is the reason why according to Carey (2005), a programme, based on the knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the individual pupil, which adopts an inclusive and multi-sensory approach addresses the challenges experienced by a child presenting with SEN and is necessary in reading programme provision.

5.2.3 Provision of Training for Parents

A major finding in this project was that there is a need for more training and more opportunities to be put in place for parents to enable them to understand schemes and programmes that are being used in schools so that they can support their child with SEN at home. This evidence directly relates to the research question: What strategies support the development of reading comprehension skills within the context of home based literacy?

Addressing the needs Identified by Parents

Communication with the school should be open and two-way by way of a journal for providing and enabling home-school links. The provision of support groups, pamphlets containing information about relevant outside organisations as well as the establishment of reading groups for children were all implied by participants in this study. Thus the concept of family literacy is necessary (Meek, 1988). This view was also supported in my findings as well as keeping parents involved in aspects of their children's schooling. A communication notebook between home and school can be very useful and this in turn can enable parents to feel more involved in how their child is progressing at school.

Development of Courses for Parents

Based on evidence drawn from the study, parents need help from the school by way of being provided with a short course or some information to enable them to assist their children with reading acquisition skills (Sylva, 2000). Input into how to support their child at home could assist with the completion of homework assignments as this is an area that poses many challenges for parents and differentiating homework tasks to suit the needs of the child, leaving more difficult tasks until the end of the homework session and establishing good homework routines and making time to read together were all advocated by parents as areas where they needed help.

Supporting Parental Involvement

The concepts of improving reading comprehension pose enormous problems (Paris and Hamilton, 2009). This area will explore that parents feel the ways in which teachers need to translate the strategies in the classroom (including the skills taught and how this is achieved in content areas) to enable parents to help their child in the home context. In order to facilitate the involvement of parents, there is a need for schools to help parents by providing guidance in the following areas: questioning skills, techniques for shared

reading, reading to and with children, appropriate choice of books, explanation of the yearly class programme, comprehension strategies, class-based interventions such as Literacy Lift-Off that includes parents. Boards of Management need to provide funding for resources that will support the children with SEN. Schools need regular contact with parents and to involve parents in the school self-evaluation process in order to ascertain the help that parents need as this will have a direct bearing on the home situation.

Home factors have a great bearing on school literacy attainment according to the National Child Development Study carried out within the UK by Davie et al (1972). Studies carried out by Tizard et al. (1982), Beverton et al. (1993) and Poulson et al. (1997) concur with these findings. Therefore it is proposed that parents need to be taught some basic skills in the teaching of reading and they need to be informed about the progression of their child's programme during the school year as a support to enhancing the child's reading ability. According to the evidence gathered in this study, support from schools is inconsistent, varied, often not available at all and often parents have to fight for adequate support for their child and pay tutors privately to up-skill themselves and pay for private tuition for their child outside of school. Parents need to be supported from the point at which their child's difficulty is diagnosed and throughout the duration of their child's schooling. Parents should be enabled to have a working knowledge of their child's reading programme. In this study parents advocated the implementation of a shared reading programme as well as showing a great willingness on their behalf to up-skill themselves if support was provided for them from the school. In the early stages of learning to read the best curricula offers an amalgam of elements, including reading for meaning, reading for thinking, experience with high quality literature, systematic instruction in phonics, systematic instruction in reading comprehension skills, development of sight vocabulary and ample opportunities to read (Lerner, 2006). In order that parents be up skilled in this area support from school is necessary.

5.2.4 Leadership for Learning

In my study I found that collaboration was necessary between the board of management, school principal, in-school management, mainstream class teachers and special education teachers in developing and implementing school plans that facilitated inclusion of children with SEN. Leadership should be facilitated through both formal and informal mechanisms. The principal should play a pivotal role that is informed by consultation and collaboration.

Whole School Development Planning

Whole-school development planning is an ongoing reflective process that enables the school to enhance the quality of its provision and to facilitate and manage change. In relation to inclusive provision, I found that best practice considers the aims and values of the school community and outlines a vision for future development. A course of action towards realising that vision is also formulated. School development planning includes policies, practices and procedures pertaining to all areas of school life, encompassing management, leadership and learning. It therefore provides a foundation of inclusive principles against which progress towards inclusion for pupils with SEN can be measured. The development of whole-school policy is at the heart of embracing inclusive education. Providing a wide and varied range of appropriate materials, programmes, schemes and models of classroom organisation and after-school supports all contribute to differentiation and support children with SEN.

The Role of Curriculum Planning and Teacher Preparation

Teacher preparation has been identified as a key element in sound inclusive practice in this study. Teachers must be skilled in their teaching and able to respond in a flexible way to students' needs for instructive feedback as they read (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). The notion of teacher effectiveness in supporting reading comprehension is necessary as the single most important determinant of pupil

performance, accounting for 40% of the difference in overall pupil performance in reading ability (Darling-Hammond, 1998).

However, the diploma course in SEN is not available to teachers working in mainstream classes. In Ireland we created an SEN system in ten years that it had taken our European counterparts thirty years to create (Carey, 2005). I recommend that teachers require additional support in their teaching of reading comprehension skills as well as on placing greater emphasis on planning reading, writing and oral language skills designed to enhance pupils' comprehension of text (Eivers et al., 2005). Therefore the role of teacher preparation in the development of reading comprehension skills for pupils with SEN is vital. Teachers need to be adequately and appropriately prepared to effectively teach reading comprehension (Taylor et al., 2002). The factors which lead to improvement in this area are teacher proficiency in the use of a range of word-recognition strategies and the appropriate use of higher level questioning skills. This can only be achieved by the effective preparation of teachers in their endeavours to meet all the challenges encountered by children when they are faced with obstacles and barriers to comprehension when they are reading. An important factor contributing to the success of teaching reading comprehension is that teachers should have solid preparation to deliver comprehension strategy instruction.

Record Keeping

Record keeping is necessary for whole-school review and planning of programmes, assessment of children, and goal setting for individual children. Caution needs to be exercised when choosing assessments as intercorrelations among some tests suggest that they were measuring different skills (Keenan et al., 2008). These good practices identified in my study will ensure the best outcomes for pedagogy. My study revealed that school management and staff should engage in curriculum planning as a core component of

inclusive teaching and learning. Curriculum planning for inclusion aims for learning experiences which feature the following elements:

- differentiated content of the material taught
- differentiated processes relating to methods, materials and activities used
- differentiated outcomes and ways in which pupils demonstrate their learning. These activities are designed to engage pupils with special educational needs in a broad range of learning experiences that will enable them to reach their full potential.

Planning for Individual Needs

One key finding from the study was that planning for individual needs for the child with SEN is an essential part of a whole-school policy on inclusion. Individualised planning is supplementary to the planning that is common to all pupils. This planning outlines how teaching and learning takes place within a differentiated curriculum that is designed to suit the needs of the child. In the context of a continuum of support, many pupils with SEN may require individualised education planning (IEPs), which can take many forms ranging from making relatively minor changes to formulating more detailed individualised programmes. Meeting individual needs may involve differentiation of the curriculum, implementing a range of teaching methods and utilising resources and supports as appropriate to meet the needs of the child with SEN.

Developing Inclusive Assessment Practices

Although schools used a number of approaches for assessing the children's learning in order to support practice, whilst these tests varied between the schools all did see the strength of such assessments when informing their work. The simple view of reading is a model that espouses adopting a holistic approach which recognises the critical approach to teaching comprehension, because the basic argument is made that reading comprehension is influenced by decoding and listening comprehension. This highlights the fact that if a teacher wants to help a reader, then the focus of assessments and instructional interventions

must be on either or both of these elements (Svensson, 2008) and this in turn will aid schools with the early identification of reading difficulties. In light of this I would suggest that *TEST2r* (Cogan, 2017) be administered in all schools as it not only identifies difficulties but provides suggestions for remediating them as well.

Supporting Identification of Reading Difficulties

The early identification of reading difficulties is paramount to early intervention being implemented as this will impact comprehension and comprehension is the purpose of reading. It is therefore relevant that this concept is at the core of any reading programme (Lerner, 2006). In a school context the reader endeavours to bridge the gap that exists between what they are reading and the knowledge which they already possess in order to make sense of it. My research concedes that the comprehension of reading depends on what the reader brings to the written material by way of experience, knowledge of language and recognition of syntactic structure (Lerner, 2006). Thus reading comprehension is a thinking process which is akin to problem solving and requires a pupil to actively interact with the text. For this to occur for a child with SEN, reading difficulties should be identified early in order that supports and strategies can be put in place that will inform classroom practice.

Enabling Inclusive Classroom Practice

Despite class teachers facing many daily challenges, best classroom practice reflects differentiated teaching methodologies suited to the needs of the individual children, encompassing components of the simple view, the skills-based approach and the meaning emphasis approaches to reading. The compilation of an Individual Education Plan (IEP), efficient time-tabling and training in approaches to teaching reading for children with SEN are all pre-requisites for successful teaching. Proficiency in phonological processing is not the main determinant of reading acquisition. While the measurement of reading in terms of

phonological awareness is quantifiable, comprehension however, and the range of skills which support it, is much more difficult to measure (Bishop and Adams, 1990). This difficulty in measuring the range of skills that support comprehension highlights that while school's may subscribe to the importance of comprehension as well as decoding, the lack of clarity is further aggravated by the tension between the meaning-emphasis based proponents versus the subscribers to the knowledge and skills based approach, i.e. the top down versus bottom up approaches to the teaching of reading. The 'simple view' of reading is presented as a model in which reading and comprehension is a function of the interaction between the ability to decode words and language comprehension. In assessing the models of reading and their place in a reading instruction programme school's must be aware that many divergent approaches may be necessary in order to facilitate the differing needs of pupils and no one single approach may provide all the answers which encompasses the notion of differentiation. Presenting an approach that attempts to embed the explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies within specific subjects enables students' application of reading comprehension strategies (Concannon-Gibney and McCarthy, 2012).

Supporting Differentiation

The concept of differentiating the curriculum for children with reading difficulties was identified in my data as key to inclusive practice as was the realisation that there is no one single approach to the teaching of reading for these children (Flynn and Stainthorp, 2006). A major issue for schools are the challenges experienced by a child with SEN in learning to read. As these children are often taught within an inclusive setting, the challenges which they present with, in the development of reading comprehension acquisition are addressed by differentiation of the curriculum which is critical in the provision of a balanced reading programme for such children. This differentiation often occurs through the provision of learning support.

Learning Support Provision

Learning to read is a complex process and requires the interaction of a number of skills such as visual discrimination, visual and auditory memory, language, phonological skills and knowledge of rhyme (Westwood, 2003). Learning support provision should include these components in a reading programme and is sometimes offered in the one-to-one withdrawal context. Within the one-to one withdrawal context, children should be enabled to transfer skills learned in the one-to one withdrawal situation back into the classroom context. It is possible to increase the reading comprehension skills of all children when teachers spend time modelling and demonstrating effective strategies for processing text (Westwood, 2003:112). Strategies which elicit self-questioning, monitoring of the text and construction of graphic organisers are all worthwhile. The following skills are essential for reading comprehension: language, visualising, sequencing, reading rate, vocabulary, strategy training, background knowledge to understand text and procedures for monitoring and repairing comprehension (King, 2006:41; Swanson and Hoskyn, 1998). This would facilitate the implementation of the Irish Primary School Curriculum which recognises that the development of literacy includes acquiring an appreciation of the conventions of text, a knowledge of the terminology and conventions of books and the ability to use a range of reading and comprehension skills (DES, 1999). Types of learning support offered that facilitate this ability to transfer are the practice of early intervention, the practice of station teaching, modelling comprehension strategies, and the practice of team teaching.

Team Teaching

In considering the factors that are necessary in formulating an inclusive and comprehensive programme in the teaching of reading, models of team teaching support inclusion. The inclusion paradigm places responsibility with the school to make instructional changes in order to accommodate all pupils (King, 2007). In formulating an inclusive programme in the teaching of reading many factors need to be considered. Almost all children, despite the

difficulties that they present with can be helped to acquire skills in word recognition and comprehension through application of effective teaching methods and adapting flexible classroom practice (Butler and Stillman, 2002) through practices that make learning easier for them and the teachers using tools to support learning.

Tools to Support Learning

Drawing on evidence obtained from my participants, the use of visual timetables help children with their organisational skills gives them the skills that will enable them to better negotiate their school day. This is vital especially for children with multiple needs and co-morbid conditions. Systemic change is necessary in order to adequately address the needs of the child and to appropriately address additional issues which often present.

Supporting children in the area of social skills development is necessary as well as supporting parents by way of clear and concise reporting and clear home-school communication. This research evidence helps us to work productively to meet the personalised needs of all pupils, whether we call them late developers, dyslexics or precocious readers (Svensson, 2008).

Class teachers need to be trained in the area of supporting the child with EBD and also need up-skilling in the area of supporting children who are identified as being gifted and talented. Schools should implement strategies that build self-esteem in children as this was a problem area that was identified by my participants. This can be done with the assistance of a special needs assistant if available. The provision of an SNA can be an invaluable support in the classroom. The role of the speech and language therapist can support the child in the area of recalling information, implementing visualisation strategies all of which facilitate the development of comprehension as a close relationship has been highlighted between reading comprehension failure and poor oral language abilities (Bishop and Adams, 1990).There is a need for good oral language teaching, phonological

awareness training, development of a sight vocabulary, word recognition and word-attack skills and the use of graded reading schemes. There is also a need for the application of many approaches and methodologies that take cognisance of multi-sensory techniques to enhance a child's learning experience.

The Child's Learning Experience

My study revealed that every pupil learns differently and they all present with individual needs. My findings revealed that a pupil's learning experience is enhanced by a commitment to inclusion through differentiation, positive classroom relations and commitment to family involvement. Positive learning experiences increase participation in and access to the curriculum for the child with SEN. It enhances academic and social skills and this will have a positive effect on the self-esteem of the child.

Development of a Positive Attitude to Reading Development

Children need to know that there is a purpose for reading (Meek et al., 1977) and explicit explanation of the text needs to take place to facilitate comprehension and understanding of what is being read. A reasonable hypothesis to propose is that if elementary reading instruction were to be transformed so that children were taught the skills and knowledge that he advocates, children's comprehension and reading skills would be better (Pressley, 2000). In light of this assertion the issue of where the school places its focus (teaching, assessment, testing and outcomes) is imperative. In general, therefore, it seems that if school's present a positive attitude to reading development this leads to better outcomes for children. The development of pre-reading and reading readiness programmes and early intervention strategies that result in children being able to read well and comprehend well by second class supports them in their future learning. The necessity for teachers to avail of CPD is also a factor that leads to a positive disposition.

The influence of having a positive disposition towards reading development is conducive to good inclusive practice concurs with Barry (2005) who advised teachers to become more familiar with the intricacies of developmentally appropriate practices. In light of this there is a great need for teachers and educators to have substantial knowledge of the strategies which are most effective for the teaching of literacy in general and especially in the area of reading comprehension.

School Self-Evaluation to enable Inclusion

Children with reading difficulties tend to struggle with the actual process of deciphering print and actually miss out on the interpretation of meaning (Ott, 1997). It is therefore necessary to collect evidence from children about how they experience their own learning, recognition of their metacognitive strategies and the ways in which they learn best. This is also supported by formally collecting data and evidence from parents by way of the school self evaluation process.

According to my findings, parents received very little help from the school or did not receive questionnaires asking them to ascertain their needs and opinions. There is need for schools to engage parents in the SSE process and this good inclusive practice concurs with (Meek, 1988) who advocated the concept of family literacy. Gleaning evidence from parents would support teachers by adding this to support teachers own evidence base.

It is necessary that development plans compiled as a result of the SSE process must be adopted as school policy and implemented otherwise they are worthless. Prioritising one area for development helps schools to better focus because if elementary reading instruction were to be transformed so that children were taught the skills and knowledge that they need in order to become effective readers, children's comprehension and reading skills would be better (Pressley, 2000). The issue of where the school places its focus

(teaching, assessment, testing and outcomes) is important as well as ascertaining how effectiveness of strategy implementation and the strategy itself is monitored and evaluated in schools. This would translate in better practices for schools.

The Teaching Experience

Teachers interviewed in my study reported that effective teaching for including pupils with SEN involves the use of suitable teaching and learning methodologies, materials and appropriate teaching arrangements. These include the following elements:

- co-operative teaching,
- differentiation
- the promotion of positive classroom relationships. Positive teaching experiences enriches both the teacher's role and pupil participation and outcomes and creates meaningful classroom experiences.

Curriculum Implementation

My study provided evidence that teachers and pupils play interdependent roles in the classroom. Teachers teach and facilitate and engage pupils in their learning. Pupils are only able to participate appropriately in the learning activities if they are designed to meet their needs. Good classroom management and teacher planning and preparation facilitates the organisation of these processes. The learning goals outlined within the curriculum should be promoted and pupil well-being and engagement with the material in a way that is meaningful for them are prioritised.

The criteria for this to take place is underpinned by:

1. Teaching should be planned, differentiated and informed by whole-school planning to enable pupils with SEN to access the curriculum in a meaningful manner. Clearly established systems should be in place for teachers to share planning and processes with colleagues.

2. Teaching should be well prepared underpinned by a range of evidence-based teaching methodologies and approaches and supplemented by the provision of materials selected to enhance learning opportunities for pupils with SEN.
3. Lesson content should be differentiated to accommodate specific needs and abilities of pupils with SEN and they should be commensurate with the child's age, learning ability and required outcomes.
4. Classroom groupings should be flexible and organised where possible on a a mixed ability basis according to criteria such as learning preference, strengths, interests and co-operative grouping learning principles.
5. Objectives and expectations should be outlined at the beginning of lessons and learning outcomes should be summarised at the end of the lesson.
6. Appropriate timetabling should allow for teaching periods that are suitably challenging and that are enjoyable to the greatest possible degree.

Informal and Formal Assessment

Within my study evidence was presented that assessment and recognition of achievement should form an integral part of the cycle of learning as this builds a picture of a pupil's progress over time and informs the next stage of learning. This incorporates assessment for learning (AfL) and assessment of learning (AoL). Inclusive assessment should provide meaningful feedback to pupils and parents and should be age and curriculum appropriate. Inclusive assessment includes both formal and informal methods.

5.3 Strengths and Limitations to the Study

I acknowledge that there are limitations to my study but I also acknowledge the strengths. The limitations include having a small sample, the study being qualitative in design and considering only one geographic location. However, I did not conduct the research in my own geographical area and neither did I conduct it in my own school so that positionality would not be an issue. Another limitation to my study may be that are the contexts where this model cannot be used for example some classroom context may not be flexible enough to accommodate such adaptations. It is anticipated that testing of the model will explore these issues. Also, it may not be suitable for all types of children presenting with SEN,

SEN is a broad category containing a diverse range of needs and it would be appropriate to test the model to ensure that it is broad enough to support all learners regardless of their characteristics. Testing the model in various settings and contexts would be necessary in order to assess the merits of the model. The strengths of my study include the level of detail in conducting and presenting my data analysis, the selection of different participant groups and all relevant stakeholders being included in the study. By conducting my interviews and employing IPA as a method of data-analysis I was able to collect deep, rich data that reflected the experiences of my participants. This led to my being able to explore the phenomenon of the teaching of reading in depth. Using IPA to conduct my data analysis ensured validity and transparency. Given that all mainstream schools in Ireland now include children with SEN, my outcomes are therefore generalisable to other schools. As illustrated in Table 5.2 (Integration of the components of the Theoretical Models of Reading contained in A New Model of SEN Delivery) my model integrates and builds on the previous models in one comprehensive programme for children presenting with SEN. My new model is comprised of some elements of the previous theoretical models of reading outlined as well as additional information derived from my data.

5.4 Suggestions for application and for further research

In considering the application of my model to practice and in proposing future research, my model would firstly need to be tested and refined in a range of different types of school contexts to ensure that it is generalisable. Statistical testing would also need to be completed in order to explore how the model supports all learners in the classroom situation. How my model might cater for gifted children or for other non-typical or even typical children should be addressed. A general model should not only cater for SEN, but for all reading comprehension.

Future research could test and explore the impact of my new proposed model of reading in the Irish context. Since completing this study, I have endeavoured to apply my model in my own classroom context and in general I have seen an improvement in children's reading comprehension ability as evidenced by standardised assessment results, the children's own perceptions and also from the views gathered from parents. Since I have conducted the research I have refined and fine-tuned my own teaching programme to include all the elements from my thesis into what could be developed into a reading programme. I have found that it is possible to apply my model in different contexts across the inclusive classroom situation as I work in the multi-class context and I teach children with and without reading difficulties across the four junior mainstream classes. Prior to conducting this study I considered that the reading programmes available were too fragmented and there was no availability of a comprehensive programme that was coherent, linear and sequential that would enable children to gain proficiency in reading. A broad and balanced reading programme is necessary incorporating the elements from my thesis and this can be compiled into a sequential programme of reading. I have designed and developed workbooks within my school context for the children and in the future I aspire to develop a comprehensive reading programme encompassing what was evidenced in my research as being the most effective strategies to use in the teaching of a reading.

Another area of research could focus on the use of the model by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) to enhance the quality, planning and outcomes of teaching reading to children with SEN in mainstream schools. Future research could involve this model being tried and tested in school contexts. My project is from the perspective of the practitioner. Although some literature bordered on the psycho-linguistic perspective, I am looking through the lens of the practitioner. Future research could address the psycho-linguistic perspective.

5.5 Positionality and Reflexivity

As a reflective practitioner, I often engage in much reflection on my role as a teacher, however, it is also imperative that I reflect on the development of my role as a researcher and how this has enhanced my practice. I now examine my teaching in a different light as I have acquired a greater awareness of evidence based practice. Prior to conducting research, I would have considered anecdotal evidence and engaged in "trial and error" practice in order to seek teaching methodologies that were conducive to best practice. Conducting this research has given me the ability to look at evidence in a more systematic way and this has informed my teaching. If someone said "well this worked fairly well for me", it may have been very tempting to change some element of my teaching practice based on that one conversation. However, having now conducted and engaged in research myself, I now conduct my practice with a more systematic, planned and informed approach and I consider evidence as opposed to mere opinion. In this thesis I have shown that I can systematically examine literature in order to explore what is suggested therein. This has enabled me to engage in reflective teaching practice as I now can identify which strategies work best in my classroom based on the ability that I have developed to examine the theory that underpins the particular strategies that I might implement. Therefore, my perspective as a researcher as well as a teacher has been greatly enhanced.

I never intended to embark on a doctoral programme prior to this opportunity presenting itself and obtaining a doctorate degree was something that I never had envisaged or even thought about prior to this. At the outset of my studies, I considered what might be a suitable focus for my research, and as I have had a great love of and interest in the development of the area of special needs education for many years, it was not difficult for me to decide that this was the area within which I would carry out my research.

As a teacher in the mainstream class context for the past twenty one years, I have always sought ways to enable my pupils to learn to the best of their ability and I feel that it is my role to facilitate that journey of learning for them in the way that is easiest for them. To this end, my desire at the outset of this project was that I would try to elicit what are the best ways for teaching reading to children with SEN in mainstream classes. My wish was that my research would help many children, their parents and their teachers. I was also aware that changes in national policy agenda meant that the question I was addressing, and the context of my research, were issues of national interest in SEN education policy. Policy in this area has developed at a very rapid rate in Ireland so much so that practice is often left lagging behind.

Conducting my research has helped me understand that straightforward solutions in SEN are often too simplistic to address the complex nature of the problems faced by mainstream class teachers who teach children with SEN in this context. I am hopeful that my new model of teaching reading to children with SEN will make a contribution to practicing classroom teachers who, like myself, often struggle to find the best ways to meet the needs of the children that we teach. Outlining what a programme for in-service training in SEN for practicing mainstream classroom teachers should entail, as well as formulating a programme that would help parents in the home context has all made this research very worthwhile. It is also my hope that my research can enrich the dialogue among teachers about teaching and learning in SEN, and through this, in some small way, support improvement in provision in this area.

While I ponder on the issues relating to inclusion that I have examined in this thesis, I wish to relate my own experience, which holds its own place within the context of inclusion and which has helped me to articulate my thinking and to develop my practice in relation to this area.

Prior to graduating as a teacher, I graduated from St. Joseph's Hospital, Clonsilla, Dublin in 1990, where I had completed a three year undergraduate nurse training programme in the area of intellectual disabilities, under the auspices of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. On my graduation day, my late mother had occasion to speak with one of the senior sisters, Sr. Brendan, who related a poignant story which happened in the 1940s in relation to my mothers' aunt Maria, who was the mother of two little girls, Mary Teresa and Annie, both of whom presented with profound learning disabilities.

As an infant, Mary Teresa (the elder of the two children) was taken into the aforementioned residential care services of The Daughters of Charity in St. Vincent's Home for Mentally Defective Children (now named St. Vincent's Centre) that was founded in 1947 and sadly died whilst in care at the age of five. Following the news of the death of their little girl, my great-aunt Maria and her husband James made the two hundred mile journey from their island home in Achill on the West coast of Ireland to Dublin and arrived at the hospital sometime in the early hours of the morning. They were met by Sr. Brendan, who related how she was overwhelmed with sadness when Maria asked her to keep Mary Teresa's bed in the hospital available for their second little girl, Annie, who would soon be taken into the care of the same services. Annie was duly taken into the care of the services and I had the privilege of nursing her there in her adult years when I was a student in the same hospital. My mother was overcome that some fifty years later I would graduate from this hospital where her aunt had suffered such heartache all those years ago.

Four years after my graduation, my nephew Patrick was born with a rare genetic disorder called Prader-Willi syndrome. At the age of five he was enrolled as a pupil in my school and I taught him there for five years. He was the first child presenting with special educational needs to be included in a mainstream school in our area. We are proud to say that our school was instrumental in breaking the mould in relation to attitudes towards the

inclusion. Due to the extent of Patrick's special educational needs, it was necessary that he go into an exclusively special setting after leaving us, as the post-primary schools in our area could not adequately provide for his needs. This meant that he had to travel eighty miles every day, completing the journey to and from his home to the special school in our nearest town.

In light of these experiences it is my hope that I am more enabled to empathise with a family whose child presents with SEN. It is because of the likes of Mary Teresa, Annie, Patrick and their parents that we continue to be inspired to overcome the difficulties that inclusion presents. Placed alongside the suffering which the families of these children often had to endure, our hardship as educators in our quest for inclusion seems miniscule and insignificant. However, together we must strive forward in the creation of a reality where this suffering will be no more and where all children will be cherished for their uniqueness and their difference. I will end with the words of the song 'Imagine' by John Lennon: '*You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us and the world will be as one'*.

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Appendices

Appendix 1[1] Codebook:

IPA - Phase 1 - Initial Coding & Noting - 76 initial codes developed	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
ADHD	2	2
Assessment	16	47
Assessment Tests	15	41
Identification of Reading Difficulties	16	38
Metacognitive Strategies	2	3
Attitude to Reading Development	13	22
Positive Disposition	13	21
Autism	4	4
Best Practice	11	15
Biography	12	13
Classroom Practice	7	13
Deis	2	2
Differentiation	18	89
Dyslexia	11	18
Support	1	1
Dyspraxia	2	5
Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties	1	1
Gifted and Talented	1	1
Homework	10	20
Parental Perspectives	3	10
Intervention Strategies	21	286
Developing Sight Vocabulary	8	15
Developing Writing Skills	4	5
Early Intervention	17	41
Fluency	1	1
Oral Language	9	19
Parental Input	1	1
Peer Tutoring for Reading Fluency	1	1
Phonological Awareness	14	36
Programmes and Schemes	17	87
Shared Reading	6	13
Skills for Effective Reading	16	33
Use of Drama	2	3
Use of Large Format Books	1	1
Use of Story	10	25
Learning Support Provision	11	33
Multi-Sensory Approach	1	1

[1] Initial Coding and Noting – involved deconstructing the data from its original chronology to an initial set of non-hierarchical codes

IPA - Phase 1 - Initial Coding & Noting - 76 initial codes developed	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
Parental Involvement	16	50
Evidence from Parents	4	6
Parental Perspectives	3	4
Child's attitude to Reading	5	27
Courses for Parents	2	5
Needs Identified by Parents	5	18
Reading Ability	5	16
Reading Programme Provision	4	7
Support from School	5	37
Reading Comprehension	15	24
Inclusive Strategies	15	50
Parental Perceptions	2	2
Reading Comprehension Organisation	15	39
Reading Comprehension Strategies	20	94
Reading Comprehension Strategies (Evaluation)	14	22
Transfer to Other Subjects	16	33
Record Keeping	4	5
Role of Principal	4	7
Support for Teachers	11	14
School Self-Evaluation	2	2
Evidence from Children	7	8
Evidence from Parents	7	9
Evidence from Teachers	7	10
Self Esteem	7	14
Special Educational Needs	16	51
One to One Withdrawal	3	10
Special Needs Assistant	1	1
Speech and Language	3	4
Spelling	9	21
Teacher Preparation	13	41
Team Teaching	9	26
Technology	12	27
Theoretical Models of Reading	10	14
Meaning Emphasis Approach	10	17
Skills Based Approach	3	3
The Simple View	1	2
Visual Timetables	1	1
Whole School Organisation	6	8
School Policy	4	5

Appendix 2[2] (Codebook):

IPA - Phase 2 - Developing Subordinate Themes - 8 superordinate themes were identified in phase 2 and phase 1 codes were mapped to these	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
Assessment	20	126
Assessment Tests	15	41
Identification of Reading Difficulties	16	38
Classroom Practice	7	13
Differentiation	18	89
Intervention Strategies	21	371
Best Practice	11	15
Classroom Practice	7	13
Developing Sight Vocabulary	8	15
Developing Writing Skills	4	5
Early Intervention	17	41
Fluency	1	1
Multi-Sensory Approach	1	1
Oral Language	9	19
Parental Input	1	1
Peer Tutoring for Reading Fluency	1	1
Phonological Awareness	14	36
Programmes and Schemes	17	87
Shared Reading	6	13
Skills for Effective Reading	16	33
Spelling	9	21
Technology	12	27
Use of Drama	2	3
Use of Large Format Books	1	1
Use of Story	10	25
Whole School Organisation	6	8
Learning Support Provision	11	33
One to One Withdrawal	3	10
Team Teaching	9	26
Visual Timetables	1	1
Parental Perspectives	3	4
Child's attitude to Reading	5	27
Courses for Parents	2	5
Homework	10	20
Needs Identified by Parents	5	18
Parental Input	1	1
Parental Involvement	16	50

[2] Developing Subordinate Themes – involved mapping initial codes developed in phase 1 to 8 identified subordinate themes to categorise initial codes and reconstruct the data into a framework that helped address the research questions and aims of the study

IPA - Phase 2 - Developing Subordinate Themes - 8 superordinate themes were identified in phase 2 and phase 1 codes were mapped to these	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
Reading Ability	5	16
Reading Programme Provision	4	7
Support from School	5	37
School Self-Evaluation	19	54
Attitude to Reading Development	13	22
Evidence from Children	7	8
Evidence from Parents	7	9
Evidence from Teachers	7	10
Metacognitive Strategies	2	3
Special Educational Needs	20	111
ADHD	2	2
Autism	4	4
Dyslexia	11	18
Dyspraxia	2	5
Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties	1	1
Gifted and Talented	1	1
One to One Withdrawal	3	10
Self Esteem	7	14
Special Needs Assistant	1	1
Speech and Language	3	4
Teacher Preparation	13	41
Record Keeping	4	5

Appendix 3[3] (Codebook):

IPA - Phase 3 - Developing Superordinate Themes - 8 phase 2 subordinate themes mapped and collapsed to 3 superordinate themes with subthemes	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
T1 – Perceptions	20	239
Parental Perceptions	*20*	*185*
School Perceptions	*19*	*54*
T2 – Practices	20	245
T2.1 – Assessment	*16*	*47*
T2.2 - Classroom Practice	*7*	*13*
T2.3 - Learning Support Provision	*11*	*33*
T2.4 - Special Educational Needs	*20*	*111*
T2.5 - Teacher Preparation	*13*	*41*
T3 – Pedagogy	21	371
T3.1 - Intervention Strategies	*21*	*371*

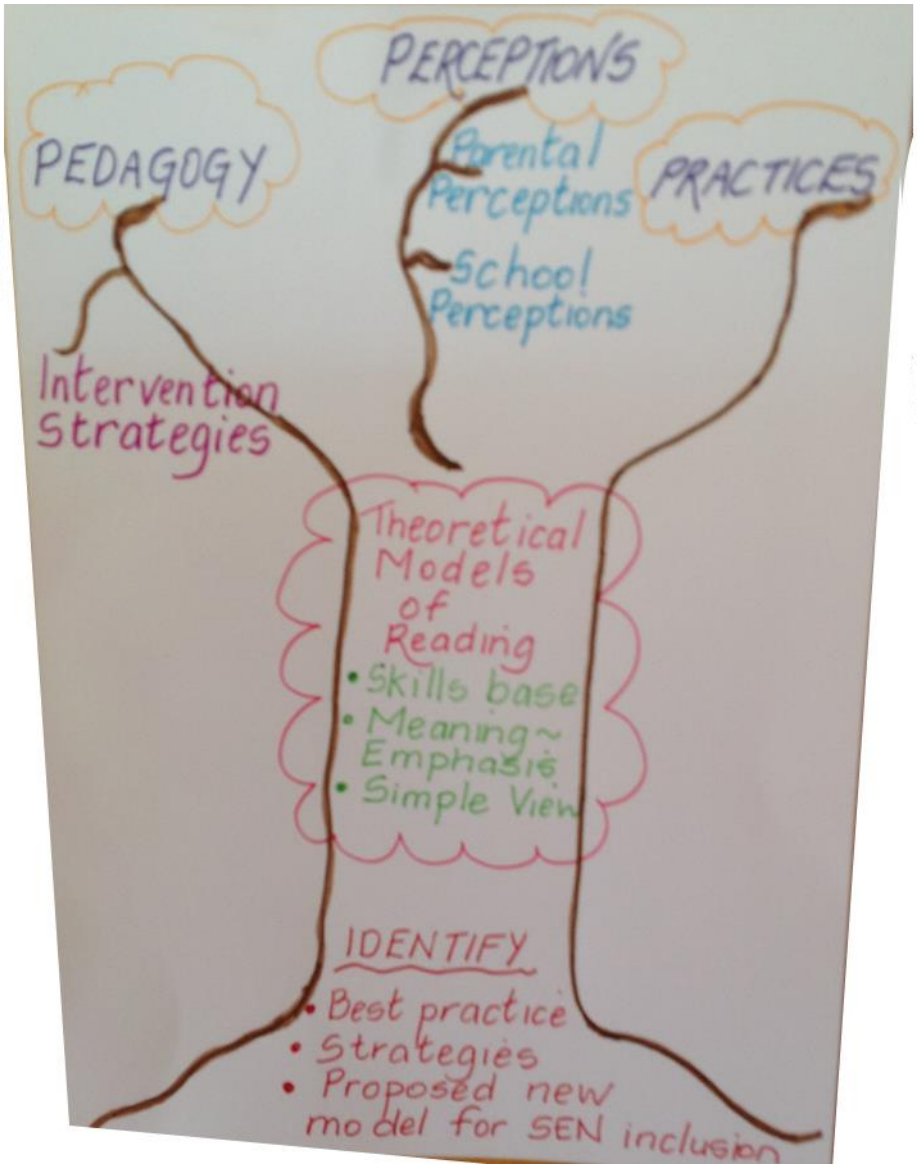
[3] Developing superordinate themes – involved conceptually mapping and collapsing subordinate themes developed in phase 2 to more consolidated and abstract superordinate themes for retrieval, analysis and reporting of findings.

Appendix 4[4] (Codebook):

Example of in-case and cross-case analysis	Principals	ClassTeachers	Learning Support Teachers	Parents
T1 - Perceptions	6	15	4	21
T2 - Practices	13	17	5	5
T2.1 - Assessment	4	2	0	1
T2.2 - Classroom Practice	1	1	0	0
T2.3 - Learning Support Provision	0	5	2	2
T2.4 - Special Educational Needs	3	7	2	2
T2.5 - Teacher Preparation	5	3	1	0
T3 - Pedagogy	14	46	7	8
T3.1 - Intervention Strategies	14	46	7	8

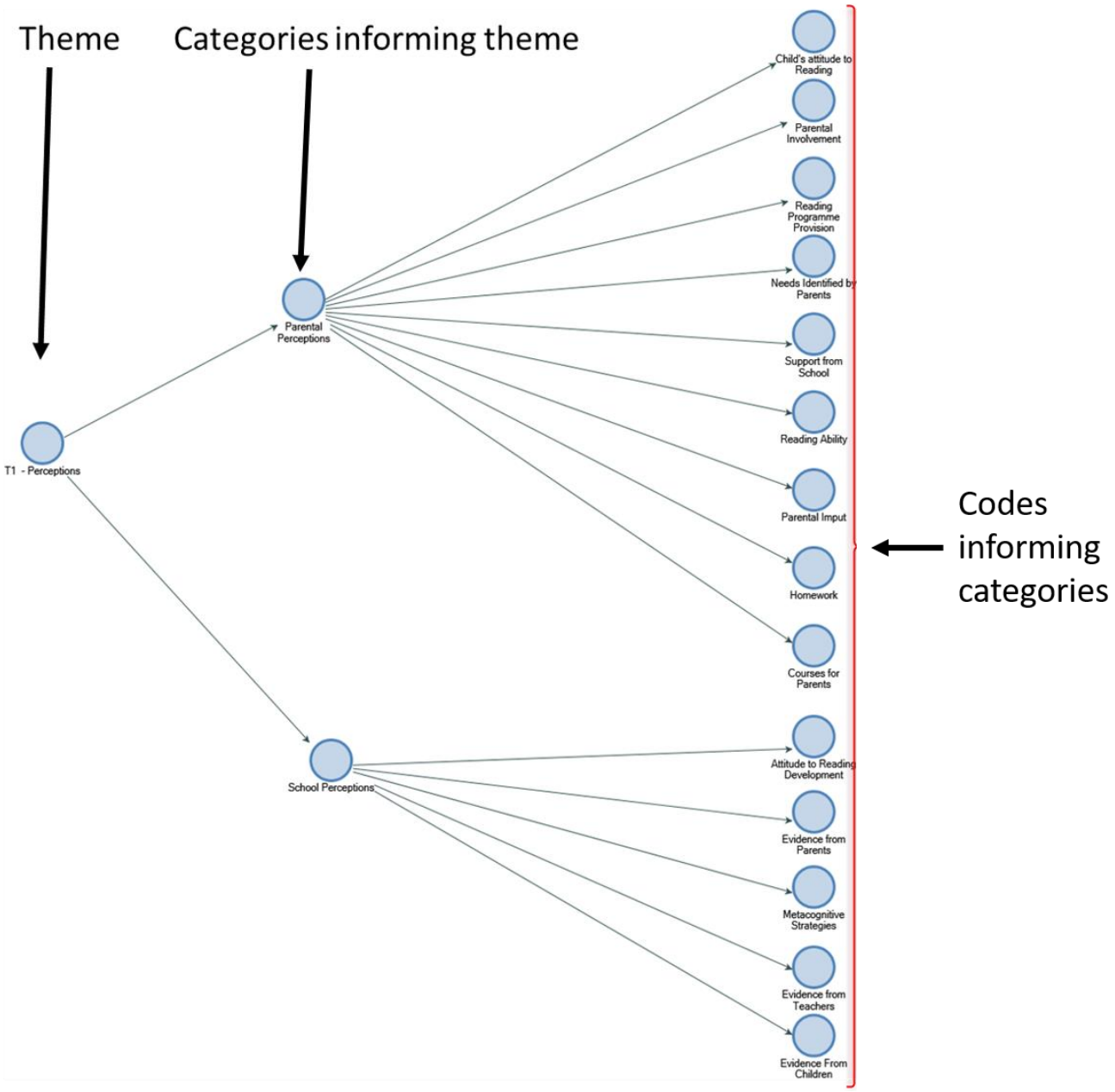
[4] In-case and Cross-case analysis – involved analysing voice distribution in superordinate themes by perspectives, research sites and demographics sing matrices. Appendix 4 shows parents and class teachers were the perspectives most concerned with perceptions while teaching professionals were most concerned intervention strategies

Appendix 5[5]: Example of Conceptual Mapping



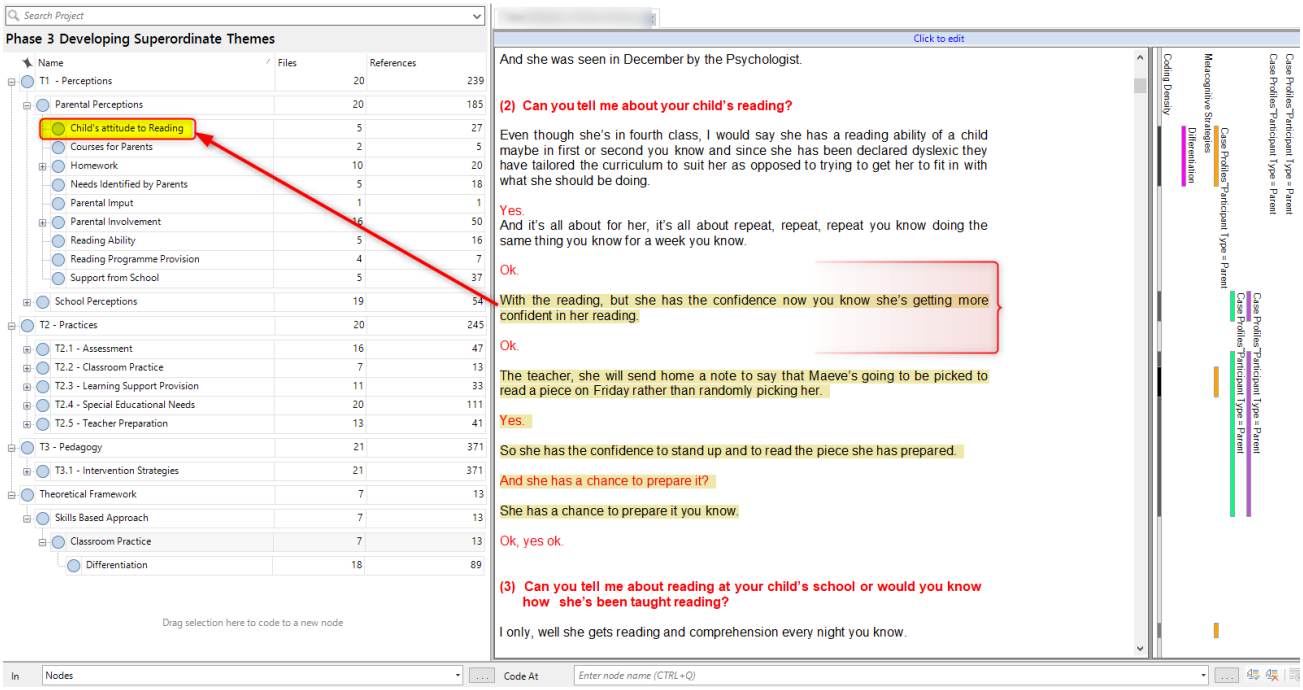
[5] Conceptual Mapping – involved researcher led abstraction from the codebook to recognise relationships across and between superordinate themes

Appendix 6[6]: Example of flow from codes, to categories to themes



[6] Appendix 6 shows how earlier created codes were mapped to categories and categories to themes

Appendix 7[7]: Example of Encoding process



[7] Appendix 7 – Example of the process of coding – text is dragged to codes based on meaning – this example shows the passage "*With the reading, but she has the confidence now you know she's getting more confident in her reading"*. This was coded to "Child's attitude to reading"

Appendix 8: Interview Questions for Principal Teacher

ORGANISATION

1. How did you come to be a principal?
2. Can you tell me about reading at your school?
3. Do you see the aspect of reading comprehension as being an important part of the literacy curriculum? Why?
4. How do you understand your role in the provision of a reading comprehension programme?
5. As principal what do you see as your role in the provision of an effective reading comprehension programme?
6. How is the teaching of reading comprehension organised within your school?
7. Do you have a school policy for Reading Comprehension instruction and if so what areas does it cover?
8. If so, does this policy include provision for children with SEN?
9. How do you implement school policy in the area of reading comprehension?
10. How does this translate into classroom practice?
11. Have you got a reading comprehension programme in place in your school?
12. How do you organise the teaching of reading comprehension within the class context?
13. How do you support teachers in the implementation of the reading comprehension programme?

STRATEGIES AND SKILLS

1. What do you see as being the necessary skills for a child to learn in order that he/she will be an enabled to be an effective reader?
2. How do you identify strategies that foster and develop reading comprehension skills within the inclusive school setting?
3. Do you currently place emphasis on the teaching of the strategies necessary for the development of reading comprehension skills?
4. What reading comprehension strategies are in put in place in order to support implementation of the reading comprehension programme?
5. How is the effectiveness of strategy implementation and the strategies themselves monitored and evaluated?

6. How do you use comprehension strategies to encourage successful reading in the inclusive classroom?

7. What strategies will give pupils the tools and the knowledge to acquire meaning from the written word?

INCLUSION OF PUPILS WITH SEN

1. How is comprehension instruction used as an effective intervention for children with literacy difficulties in your primary school?

2. Do you have/ have not an inclusive programme in reading comprehension to include pupils with SEN?

3. Which reading comprehension strategies work best for children presenting with SEN in the classroom?

4. Do you perceive that teaching reading comprehension strategies encourages successful reading in pupils presenting with SEN?

5. How do you implement strategies for pupils presenting with SEN and what resources and/or special support is drawn upon?

6. How do you address the needs of pupils presenting with SEN in the area of reading comprehension acquisition skills?

7. What divergent approaches to teaching reading comprehension are implemented in order to facilitate the differing needs of pupils within your inclusive school setting?

8. How do you perceive the strategy encourages successful reading in pupils presenting with SEN?

9. What supports are put in place to enable pupils with SEN to enhance their reading comprehension skills?

10. How is the teaching of reading comprehension as a learning skill in content areas achieved within the inclusive setting?

11. How can comprehension instruction be used to enable readers presenting with SEN to improve their reading skills?

12. What types of strategies do you use in order to enable your pupils with SEN to develop reading comprehension skills?

13. How does the use of comprehension strategies encourage successful reading in pupils presenting with SEN?

ASSESSMENT AND TESTING

1. Where does the school place its focus regarding teaching, assessment, testing and learning outcomes?

2. What assessment tools do you use to assess reading comprehension?

3. How is reading comprehension assessed within your school?

PARENTS

1. Do you put any supports in place to enable parents to help their children at home in the area of reading comprehension?

2. Which strategies enable the fostering and development of reading comprehension skills not only within the inclusive school setting but also within the context of home based literacy?

3. What evidence have you collected from parents regarding their needs in the area of reading comprehension?

4. How do you support parents to help their children in the area of reading comprehension at home?

THE ROLE OF TEACHER PREPARATION

1. Do you feel adequately prepared to successfully lead and organise the teaching of reading comprehension strategies to children presenting with SEN?

2. What do you see as being the role of teacher preparation in the development of reading comprehension skills for pupils with SEN?

3. What is the role of teacher preparation in the development of reading comprehension skills for pupils with SEN?

THE THEORETICAL MODELS OF READING

1. How do you as principal facilitate enabling teachers to learn about the models of reading?

2. What models of reading are being provided within the classroom context and do you work from these models?

3. How are the models of reading used within the classroom context to enable children with SEN to effectively comprehend what they are reading?

4. Are these models enabling children with SEN to comprehend and are the models delivering the strategies to enable the child to read well?

5. Do you conduct comprehension teaching within a meaningful context using strategies which incorporate the meaning-emphasis approach to reading?

6. What are your views about their role in implementing reading comprehension strategies to support inclusion?

7. How do you as school principal feel that using the models of reading support implementation of the strategy or strategies (including supporting pupils, teachers and parents)?

8. What information have you gleaned from the children regarding their own learning in the area of reading comprehension?

9. What do you classify as best practice in the area of reading comprehension teaching?

Appendix 9: Interview Questions for Class Teacher

GENERAL

1. Can you tell something about yourself and how you came to be a teacher?

2. Can you tell me about reading at your school?

3. What role do you see for reading comprehension in the literacy curriculum? Why?

4. How is the teaching of reading comprehension organised within your school?

5. How do you experience this organisation within your classroom/learning support setting?

6. How are teachers supported in the implementation of the reading comprehension programme?

STRATEGIES AND SKILLS

1. What reading comprehension strategies are in put in place in order to support implementation of the reading comprehension programme?

2. Are the reading comprehension strategies evaluated? How and why?

3. What do you see as being the necessary skills for a child to learn in order that he/she will be an enabled to be an effective reader?

4. Do you conduct comprehension teaching within a meaningful context using strategies which incorporate the meaning-emphasis approach to reading?

5. What strategies do you put in place to enable children to interpret and reconcile information?

6. What strategies will give pupils the tools and the knowledge to acquire meaning from the written word?

7. What particular strategies do you as a teacher use to teach reading comprehension?

8. What are your views about their role in implementing reading comprehension strategies to support inclusion?

9. How do you translate the strategies in the classroom (including the skills taught and how this is achieved in content areas)?

10. How do you use the strategies to support individual learners?

11. What do you classify as best practice in the area of reading comprehension teaching?

INCLUSION OF PUPILS WITH SEN

1. How do you address the needs of pupils presenting with SEN in the area of reading comprehension acquisition skills?

2. How are children presenting with reading difficulties identified in your teaching context?

3. Do you have/ have not an inclusive programme in reading comprehension to include pupils with SEN?

4. How do you implement strategies for pupils presenting with SEN and what resources and/or special support is drawn upon?

5. What divergent approaches are implemented in order to facilitate the differing needs of pupils within your inclusive school setting?

6. How do you enable your pupils with SEN to integrate the skills of word recognition (decoding)?

7. Which reading comprehension strategies work best for children presenting with SEN in the classroom?

ASSESSMENT AND TESTING

1. Do you currently place emphasis on assessment and testing within the inclusive classroom setting and if so how?

2. What assessment tools do you use?

THE ROLE OF TEACHER PREPARATION AND TRAINING

1. Do you feel adequately prepared to successfully teach reading comprehension strategies to children presenting with SEN?

2. What do you see as being the role of teacher preparation and training in the development of reading comprehension skills for pupils with SEN?

PARENTS

1. Which strategies are best to enable the fostering and development of reading comprehension skills not only within the inclusive school setting but also within the context of home based literacy?

2. Do you as a learning support teacher put any supports in place to enable parents to help their children at home in the area of reading comprehension?

3. Do parents come and ask you for help with their child's reading?

THEORETICAL MODELS OF READING

1. What models of reading are being provided with the classroom context?

2. How do you use the models of reading within the classroom context to enable children with SEN to effectively comprehend what they are reading?

3. Are these models enabling children with SEN to comprehend and are the models delivering the strategies to enable the child to read well?

Appendix 10: Interview Questions for Learning Support Teacher

GENERAL

1. Can you tell something about yourself and how you came to be a learning support teacher?
2. Can you tell me about reading at your school?
3. What role do you see for reading comprehension in the literacy curriculum? Why?
4. How is the teaching of reading comprehension organised within your school?
5. How do you experience this organisation within your classroom/learning support setting?
6. How do you understand your role in the implementation of the reading comprehension programme?
7. Do you see it as a professional role or personal responsibility? Explain.
8. What is your view on effectiveness in the delivery of the reading comprehension programme?
9. How are teachers supported in the implementation of the reading comprehension programme?

STRATEGIES AND SKILLS

1. What reading comprehension strategies are in put in place in order to support implementation of the reading comprehension programme?
2. Are the reading comprehension strategies evaluated? How and why?
3. How are students skills enhanced in the area of reading comprehension?
4. Do you use any other means to enhance student's skills to enable them to become effective readers?
5. What do you see as being the necessary skills for a child to learn in order that he/she will be an enabled to be an effective reader?
6. Do you currently place emphasis on the teaching of the strategies necessary for the development of reading comprehension skills?
7. Do you conduct comprehension teaching within a meaningful context using strategies which incorporate the meaning-emphasis approach to reading?
8. What strategies do you put in place to enable children to interpret and reconcile information?

9. What strategies will give pupils the tools and the knowledge to acquire meaning from the written word?

10. What particular strategies do you as a teacher use to teach reading comprehension?

11. How do you identify strategies that foster and develop reading comprehension?

12. How do you implement strategies?

13. What resources and/or special support is drawn upon?

14. How do you experience the implementation of reading comprehension strategies?

15. What are your views about their role in implementing reading comprehension strategies to support inclusion?

16. How is the effectiveness of strategy implementation and the strategies themselves monitored and evaluated?

17. How do you perceive the strategy encourages successful reading in pupils presenting with SEN?

18. How do you translate the strategies in the classroom (including the skills taught and how this is achieved in content areas)?

19. How are you supported to do so?

20. How do you use the strategies to support individual learners?

21. Where do you place emphasis (assessment, testing and teaching)?

22. What do you classify as best practice in the area of reading comprehension teaching?

INCLUSION OF PUPILS WITH SEN

1. How do you address the needs of pupils presenting with SEN in the area of reading comprehension acquisition skills?

2. How are children presenting with reading difficulties identified in your teaching context?

3. How are SEN students reading comprehension skills enhanced?

4. Do you have/ have not an inclusive programme in reading comprehension to include pupils with SEN?

5. How do you identify strategies that foster and develop reading comprehension skills within the inclusive school setting?

6. How do you use comprehension strategies to encourage successful reading in the inclusive classroom?

7. How do you implement strategies for pupils presenting with SEN and what resources and/or special support is drawn upon?

8. Do you perceive that teaching reading comprehension strategies encourages successful reading in pupils presenting with SEN?

9. What divergent approaches are implemented in order to facilitate the differing needs of pupils within your inclusive school setting?

10. How is comprehension instruction used as an effective intervention for children with literacy difficulties in your primary school?

11. What types of strategies do you use in order to enable your pupils with SEN to develop reading comprehension skills?

12. How does the use of comprehension strategies encourage successful reading in pupils presenting with SEN?

13. How is the teaching of reading comprehension as a learning skill in content areas achieved within the inclusive setting?

14. How can comprehension instruction be used to enable readers presenting with SEN to improve their reading skills?

15. How do you enable their pupils with SEN to integrate the skills of word recognition (decoding)?

16. Which reading comprehension strategies work best for children presenting with SEN in the classroom?

ASSESSMENT AND TESTING

1. Do you currently place emphasis on assessment and testing within the inclusive classroom setting and if so how?

2. What assessment tools do you use?

THE ROLE OF TEACHER PREPARATION

1. Do you feel adequately prepared to successfully teach reading comprehension strategies to children presenting with SEN?

2. What do you see as being the role of teacher preparation in the development of reading comprehension skills for pupils with SEN?

PARENTS

1. Which strategies are best to enable the fostering and development of reading comprehension skills not only within the inclusive school setting but also within the context of home based literacy?

2. Do you as a learning support teacher put any supports in place to enable parents to help their children at home in the area of reading comprehension?

3. Do parents come and ask you for help with their child's reading?

THEORETICAL MODELS OF READING

1. What models of reading are being provided with the classroom context?

2. How do you use the models of reading within the classroom context to enable children with SEN to effectively comprehend what they are reading?

3. Are these models enabling children with SEN to comprehend and are the models delivering the strategies to enable the child to read well?

Appendix 11: Interview Questions for Parent

1. Tell me a little bit about your child's experience of school?
2. Can you tell me about your child's reading?
3. Can you tell me about reading at your child's school?
4. Does the school involve parents in reading? If so, how?
5. If not, would you like to be involved?
6. Do you know how your child is learning to read?
7. Does your child sound out words when trying to read?
8. Does your child understand what he/she is reading?
9. How does your child help him/herself to understand what they are reading?
10. Were you ever made aware by the school of the term reading comprehension?
11. Do you as a parent feel supported and enabled by the school to help your child with the development of reading comprehension skills?
12. Do you feel as a parent that you are able to help and support your child with reading comprehension at home?
13. Do you receive any information from the school eg. pamphlets or information or talks about reading comprehension or ways to help your child with reading?
14. What reading comprehension supports are in put in place (if any) in order to support you as a parent with reading comprehension at home?
15. What difficulty does your child have in the area of reading?
16. How does your child feel about his/her reading difficulty?
17. Was there any support put in place for you as a parent when you were told by the school that your child had difficulties in reading?
18. What supports would you like to see being put in place to help you with your child's reading difficulty?
19. Do you feel that the school is addressing your child's needs in this area?
20. Do you think that teaching ways to tackle reading comprehension encourages successful reading in your child?
21. What help would you like to get from your school in the area of reading comprehension?

22. If you have received help with your child's reading comprehension from the school, can you tell me in what manner the programme did or did not improve your child's confidence in reading?

23. Do you think that your child has a better understanding of the meaning of what she is reading as a result of your getting help as a parent?

24. Has there been any improvement or not in your child's ability to answer questions about what she is reading as a result of you knowing about reading comprehension?

25. What do you use at home to help your child in the area of reading comprehension?

26. What do you think is lacking in the area of teaching reading comprehension for parents?

27. What help would you like to get as a parent that would help you to help your child with reading?

28. What information have you got from the school regarding your child's own learning in the area of reading comprehension?

29. Do you read to your child at home?

30. What is your child's greatest difficulty in the area of reading?

31. Does your child enjoy reading and books or not?

32. Do you know what your child's likes and dislikes are with regard to reading and books?

33. If you could compile a wish list for parents on getting support from a school in the area of reading comprehension what would be on it?

Appendix 12: Ethical Approval Form

EA2

Ethical Approval Form:
Human Research Projects

Please word-process this form. Handwritten applications will not be accepted.

UNIVERSITY OF LINCOLN

This form must be completed for each piece of research activity conducted by academics, graduate students and undergraduates. The completed form must be approved by the CERD Research Ethics Committee.
Please complete all sections. If a section is not applicable, write N/A.

1 Name of researcher	Kathleen Smyth (Student No.: 12254848) **Centre for Educational Research and Development (CERD)**
2 Position in the University	Please explain your role in the University; e.g., PhD candidate, EdD candidate, academic. EdD Candidate
3 Role in relation to this research	Please explain your role in the research; e.g., primary investigator, co-investigator. Primary Investigator
4 Brief statement of your main research question	Please state your main research question here. To explore the **management** of the teaching of reading comprehension in the development of literacy skills within the mainstream school setting where children presenting with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are supported. The type of SEN that I am interested in researching is learning difficulties. I hope to explore how certain strategies enable or prevent the development of reading comprehension, how principals identify them and how teachers experience them. I also hope to explore whether or not parents feel enabled to help their children in the area of reading comprehension at home.
5 Brief description of the project	Please give a concise and detailed explanation of the context, aims, objectives and proposed methodology of your research. **CONTEXT** I aim explore the current provision in the area of the teaching of reading comprehension within the context of the mainstream school setting where children presenting with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are supported. This research will aim to help teachers respond to the inclusion of children with SEN in our classrooms. I intend to carry out my proposed research in the context of my own school geographical area which comprises of nine rural schools located in Achill Island, on the west coast of Ireland (including the school where I currently work as a teaching principal). Within this context, I am interested in exploring the inclusion of children with SEN. **AIMS** I wish to explore the teaching of and parental support for reading

comprehension within this inclusive context as a focus. The purpose is to build a theory to better understand what provision currently exists in the area of the teaching of reading comprehension. This aligns with my own personal commitment to playing my role in helping children with SEN, their teachers and their parents.

OBJECTIVES

I believe that good teaching strategies will help children develop reading comprehension skills in the context of SEN education. My objectives are the subsidiary things that I aim to do in order to answer my questions (surveying the strategies through principals', teachers' and parents' perspectives).

Therefore, I wish to investigate how mainstream primary school principals identify strategies that foster and develop reading comprehension skills within the inclusive school setting. I would like to investigate how they implement strategies and what resources and/or special support is drawn upon. How teachers experience the implementation of reading comprehension strategies is another question to be explored.

I wish to query principals in relation to how they manage the teaching of reading comprehension and I wish to query teachers as to how they experience this management within their classroom settings. Questions regarding what teachers' views are about their role in implementing reading comprehension strategies to support inclusion will also be posed. I will also ascertain what programmes (if any) are in place.

The issue of where the school places its focus (teaching, assessment, testing and outcomes) will be addressed, as well as finding out how effectiveness of strategy implementation and the strategy itself is monitored and evaluated. Considering how far school principals perceive the strategy encourages successful reading in pupils presenting with SEN will also be explored. I feel that strategy provision is a major factor in comprehension and inclusion, and that these strategies can be identified and managed. I will learn best about such strategies by talking to teachers about how they undertake their work and by talking to parents regarding their perception of these strategies and on how this impacts upon them.

I will explore how teachers translate the strategies in the classroom (including the skills taught and how this is achieved in content areas). I hope to identify how they are supported to do so, how they use the strategies to support individual learners, how they are prepared and where they place emphasis (assessment, testing and teaching). I also hope to ascertain what teachers' views are about their role in implementing reading comprehension strategies to support inclusion. I will ask how strategies are selected and implemented.I will learn best about such strategies by talking to teachers about how they undertake their work and by talking to parents regarding their perception of these strategies and on how this impacts upon them.

I also wish to examine whether or not parents feel enabled to assist their children with the development of reading comprehension skills.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The overall aim and purpose of my research will be addressed through posing the following overarching research question:

- How is the teaching of reading comprehension in the development of literacy skills managed within the mainstream school setting where children presenting with SEN are supported?

In this area, I wish to query principals in relation to how they manage the teaching of reading comprehension and I wish to query teachers as to how they experience this management within their classroom settings.

The following sub questions will identify the issues that will be explored within each area:

- How do mainstream primary school principals identify strategies that foster and develop reading comprehension skills within the inclusive school setting? How do they implement strategies and what resources and/or special support is drawn upon? How do teachers experience the implementation of reading comprehension strategies?

The issue of how school principals address the needs of children with SEN within this and also how the school principals feel they support implementation of the strategy or strategies (including supporting pupils, teachers and parents) will be examined. The issue of where the school places its focus (teaching, assessment, testing and outcomes) will be addressed, as well as finding out how effectiveness of strategy implementation and the strategy itself is monitored and evaluated. Considering how far school principals perceive the strategy encourages successful reading in pupils presenting with SEN will also be explored.

- What are teachers' views about their role in implementing reading comprehension strategies to support inclusion?

This question will explore how teachers translate the strategies in the classroom (including the skills taught and how this is achieved in content areas). It will identify how they are supported to do so, how they use the strategies to support individual learners, how they are prepared and where they place emphasis (assessment, testing and teaching).

- Do parents feel enabled to assist their children with the development of reading comprehension skills?

In order to address this question the extent to which parents feel enabled to assist their children with the development of reading comprehension will be examined. These issues will be researched by involving parents and teachers in the process.

PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

The above questions are aligned with the philosophical assumptions that I want to know how the strategies work. The questions of how I am going to see them, what will the strategies look like and how do I know that they are useful will be explored in my methodology. How I identify a strategy that works is an epistemological question. My research design will align with my beliefs about how things work. Therefore my ontological beliefs will inform my epistemological questions. The methodology will seek answer these questions.

It is pertinent to pose the question: What are the coherent ideas that I am using to try and design my research and what am I assuming about the nature of the world? For example, if I was to assume that primary school managers can identify strategies that foster and develop reading skills and if I am assuming that strategies are aimed at fostering reading comprehension skills, then I am making ontological assumptions. I want my research to find out how they effect how children learn reading comprehension.

I am designing this research in a way that will allow me to be clear that the beliefs that I have had in how to make that knowledge, are sound beliefs. Certain methods are better than others for producing this type of knowledge. If I want to find out how something happens then I need a method that will look at process. As my research questions are based on knowledge of how things work then I am looking at processes and relationships between teaching and learning. As well as interpreting, I am also trying to explain something.

My research will be located within the interpretive paradigm using the qualitative approach. The research will refer to the selection and analysis of data obtained through conducting interviews with parents, teachers and principals with a view to providing valid and useful information. This is an interview based study. I will include school principals, teachers and parents in the study. I hope to recruit eighteen participants in the research comprising of six principals, six teachers and six parents. My selection criteria for participation will be that the principals and teachers will currently have a cohort of pupils presenting with SEN (learning difficulties) in their schools and classrooms. The selection criteria for choosing parents will be that they will have a child presenting with SEN (learning difficulties). I will have no relationship to any of the participants in eight of the schools. However, if I interview within my own school context then I will be conducting interviews with my own colleagues. I can opt for less and also exclude my own school in order to eliminate the issues arising from interviewing staff or parents from my own school. If I am to interview within my own school then I will have to take account my own role as principal teacher. In order to minimise the effect of power imbalances that this might cause, then I would make it clear that school staff were not to feel under any pressure in any way to participate. Equally as a head teacher, if I were to interview parents of children who were my pupils I would make it clear that this was not a form of special treatment, and their children would be at no advantage or disadvantage, whatever their decision about participation in my research. I will set out a description of the research and participants' rights (e.g. to withdraw) in the participant information sheet.

Data collection tools will be the use of semi-structured interviews seeking information ascertaining what teachers' views are about their role in implementing reading comprehension strategies to support inclusion. The interviews will be used as a tool to seek information from principals in relation to how they manage the teaching of reading comprehension. Interviews will also be used as a means of seeking information on parents' perceptions about reading comprehension and on the 'home literacy' element of the research. I will choose semi-structured interviews as opposed to choosing a focus group in order that each principal, parent and teacher would be afforded the opportunity of privacy in this one to

	one-to-one setting. I will conduct the interviews at my own school if suitable for the participants or within their own school contexts, all of which are within a fourteen mile radius of my own school. For the purpose of completing Assignment 4, I intend to carry out a pilot interview with my interviewee being a principal teacher.

Appendix 13: Participation Agreement Form

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT

An exploration of the management of the teaching of reading comprehension in the development of literacy skills within the mainstream school setting where children presenting with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are supported.

Agreement to Participate

Please check your responses below.

1. I understand the nature and purpose of this research.
   Yes ☐ No ☐

2. I have received enough information to make an informed decision about participating.
   Yes ☐ No ☐

3. I understand that I can raise questions, offer criticisms and make suggestions about the project.
   Yes ☐ No ☐

4. I understand that I can decide *not* to participate in this project at any time after agreeing to.
   Yes ☐ No ☐

5. Do you agree to contribute to this research? Yes ☐ No ☐

6. Can I record and transcribe our conversation? Yes ☐ No ☐

   6a. If yes, would you like a copy of the recording/transcript? Yes ☐ No ☐

Please check below to indicate your preferences

7. I would like to be identified in this research with:

   ☐my real name and/or group affiliation(s)
   ☐a pseudonym
   ☐anonymity, concealing my name and group affiliation(s)
   ☐it may depend, so please contact me before using my interview

8. I would like to be involved in/informed about this project:

   ☐just for this interview, and prefer not to be contacted again
   ☐for this interview, but would be happy to be in touch for follow-up discussion
   ☐beyond this interview, such as for workshops or collaborative work
   ☐in other ways (please explain if relevant)

Your signature indicates that you have decided to take part in this project after considering the information provided, and that you know you can raise questions and decide not to participate at any time.

Signature _____ Date _____

Name

_____

Email/contact_____

For more information, contact Kathleen Smyth
Telephone: XXX Email:XXX

Appendix 14: Information Sheet

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT

An exploration of the management of the teaching of reading comprehension in the development of literacy skills within the mainstream school setting where children presenting with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are supported.

Introduction

My name is Kathleen Smyth. As part of the requirements for a doctorate degree (Ed.D) at University of Lincoln, I have to carry out a research study. I am inviting people to take part in my research. This pamphlet explains my research so you can decide if you would like to participate.

What is the project about?

I believe that good teaching strategies will help children develop reading comprehension skills in the context of SEN education. The particular area of SEN that I am interested in is learning difficulties. I believe that parents need to be enabled to help their children in this area too. This will be enabled by examining not only teachers' but parents' current strategies for fostering reading comprehension skills in order to understand which strategies work best and identify what is lacking. I feel that strategy provision is a major factor in comprehension and inclusion, and that these strategies can be identified and managed. I will learn best about such strategies by talking to teachers about how they undertake their work and by talking to parents regarding their perception of these strategies and on how this impacts upon them. The following questions will be asked:

- How is the teaching of reading comprehension in the development of literacy skills managed within the mainstream school setting where children presenting with SEN are supported?
- How do mainstream primary school principals identify strategies that foster and develop reading comprehension skills within the inclusive school setting? How do they implement strategies and what resources and/or special support is drawn upon? How do teachers experience the implementation of reading comprehension strategies?
- What are teachers' views about their role in implementing reading comprehension strategies to support inclusion?
- Do parents feel enabled to assist their children with the development of reading comprehension skills?

What are the aims of the research?

The aim of my research study is to explore the management of the teaching of reading comprehension in the development of literacy skills within the mainstream school setting where children presenting with SEN are supported. Within this context, I am interested in exploring the inclusion of children with SEN. I wish to explore the teaching of and parental support for reading comprehension within this inclusive context as a focus.

Who else is and can be involved?

I am inviting school principals, teachers and parents of children with special educational needs to participate in the research, because they are specifically suitable to provide data for my study.

What sorts of methods are being used?

My research will be located within the interpretive paradigm using the qualitative approach.This methodology is suited to exploring behaviour and understanding perspectives in a real world setting. The research will refer to the selection and analysis of data obtained through conducting interviews with parents and teachers with a view to providing valid and useful information.

What are you being asked to do?

I am asking that you would participate in an interview and that you would consent to being recorded. No identifying information will be collected. Confidentiality will be protected. I will ensure that no clues to your identity appear in the thesis. The thesis may be read by future students on the course. Any extracts from what you say that are quoted in the thesis will be entirely anonymous. The study may be published in a research journal.

Do you have to take part?

You do not have to take part- participation is voluntary. You will be asked to sign a consent form. You may keep the information sheet and a copy of the consent form. You will have the option of withdrawing before the study commences (even if you have agreed to participate) or discontinuing after data collection has started.

Can you be more involved in the project if you like?

You will only be asked to participate in an interview for the purpose of this research project. You will not be requested to be part of the design of the study, the analysis or potential follow-up activities.

Who will benefit from this research, and how?

The ways in which a school can deal effectively with pupils who present with SEN can be outlined through my research; therefore this will be of benefit to principals and teachers. Questions which address how pupils learn best, how pupils learn differently from each other and how different learning styles can be facilitated promote a wider debate and encourage a broader reflection of the education process and will be addressed within my research. This research will aim to help teachers respond to the inclusion of children with SEN in our classrooms by exploring the teaching of and provision of parental support for reading comprehension as a focus. It will also help parents by highlighting current provision for parents.There is a need for change within the context of SEN provision, in order that schools will deal more effectively and in a more inclusive manner with pupils who present with SEN. Within the realm of inclusion and SEN provision and indeed education in general, the initiation of structured programmes of research such as this is necessary, upon which would be based the overseeing and development of resources in a sustainable way.

Who is funding this research?

This is not funded research.

Who can I contact for more information or to get involved?

Kathleen Smyth
Telephone: XXX
Email: XXX